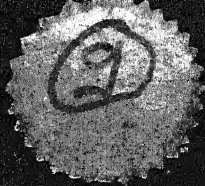


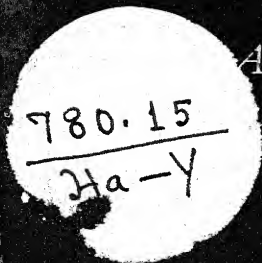
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In this last role he is as well known in Canada as in England, having twice toured the Dominion from coast to coast. Before that he had been Music Adviser to the London Regional Committee for Education among H.M. Forces and had given recitals and lectures in ships, camps, and airfields from Orkney to Plymouth, from Hamburg to Suez.

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## CHAPTER I

### MUSICIANS AND MUSIC-LOVERS

**W**HAT sort of ear do you listen with?  
This is a serious enquiry. People argue about a certain piece. They have listened to the same music, but they have not heard the same things. It is easy enough to prove.

Listen to the way they sing or hum when they are quoting their favourite passages from their most-used records. You will find that one sings in rhythm, but not in tune. Another tries to imitate orchestral sounds, but never gets louder or softer. In this way they betray something of their innate musical character. Nobody can be the complete musician or music-lover, and we would avoid much silly argument if we would recognize our limitations.

Let me declare my own qualities and limitations. I have a fine sense of rhythm. I can play unerringly through the subtlest subdivisions of the beat. I am not bothered by unusual rhythms. I will play you seven even notes per bar in the right hand against eight in the left, laconically, without strain, and my playing will look as rhythmical as it sounds.

When it comes to recognizing timbre, my wife is better than I am. She will switch on the wireless in the middle of a programme and, without hesitation, tell me who the singer is. On the strength of one "hello" she will tell me who is on the other end of the telephone. With experience and training she would know the voice of every orchestral instrument better than some conductors do.

My sense of pitch is good. I can sing any note on the piano before you play it, but a first-class violinist has (or should have) a more precise sense of pitch than I. I can leave pitch to the piano-tuner. Still, having this sense of pitch, I am inclined to put purity of singing before dramatic character. Another man, with a different ear, might well reverse the order, and will be pleased by an operatic performance that will infuriate me.

My sense of intensity is naturally good, and has been cultivated by many years of piano practice. We pianists, playing as we do on a hammer-instrument, would never be able to produce "beautiful tone" even from a good instrument unless we had fine control of intensity. Once we have started a note we cannot alter it. We must judge it unerringly before we strike it.

I have set out what may seem a boastful account of my musical gifts, but in the matter of musical gifts there is no question of boasting or of modesty. You cannot teach a man to have a gift. You can only teach him to use what he has.

When you have discovered and analysed a man's or a child's gifts you have to consider temperament. The musician's temperament is one thing; the music-lover's another. Musician and music-lover cannot live without one another, but they suffer irritation in living together. There are frequent failures of understanding.

What sort of person is a typical musician? Here is a well-hackneyed story to illustrate a point.

The visiting conductor observes that the leader of the orchestra is a picture of misery. "You no like my conducting?"

"But, maestro, you don't need me to tell you that you are one of the greatest conductors in the world."

"Zen you do not like me?"

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"But, maestro, you don't need me to tell you that you are one of the greatest conductors in the world."

"Zen you do not like me?"

"But everyone likes you."

"Why for you look like zat?"

"Well, you see, maestro, I hate music."

Does this seem incredible? Live among musicians for a while, and you will find that most of them go to concerts reluctantly. If they go, they go to hear how a rival performs or to decide whether a new work is worth adding to the repertoire. Yet the leader of the orchestra doesn't quite mean what he says. Without music he would pine. It is his natural element. He is like the sailor who in one breath tells you that he hates the sea and in another makes clear his contempt for land-lubbers.

The typical musician (you will, of course, never meet a typical musician) is often a bad listener. He hears what concerns him, and hears best when he is engaged in musical activity. Listening passively, he may suffer from as many lapses of concentration as you do.

For myself—as guide, philosopher, and friend to music-lovers these many years—I am not perhaps a typical musician; but I am a musician first, and I still hear and understand best when my fingers are on a keyboard.

Now for the typical music-lover. Why do music-lovers often irritate us musicians? Perhaps we ought to consider two music-lovers rather than one. First of all, there is the ignorant gusher. She assures you she is *passionately* fond of music—oh, but passionately—and then asks you to play on the piano some operatic titbit that makes no sort of effect without voice and orchestra.

Then there is the far-from-ignorant snob who, for some obscure reason, seems to want to humiliate the musicians he meets. You play him some Bartók, and he says, "But don't you know such and such a piece by

Janáček?" You try him with Purcell, and he wants Dittersdorf. He never permits himself to enjoy anything. This sort of person is sometimes a failed musician taking it out on those of us who earn a living in music.

I have given these unflattering portraits of musicians and music-lovers so as to make certain fundamental differences as clear as possible. But there are, of course, musicians who have an amateur's zest for listening, and there are music-lovers who sing enough or play enough to understand something of what goes on in the musician's heart.

Musician or music-lover, you have one inescapable limitation. You are the product of your time and your people. Leaving aside your ignorance of ancient Greek music or modern Chinese, you cannot hope to understand with complete sympathy every kind of music. It is music's chief miracle that it can establish contact over so many barriers of time and space, but some kinds of music travel better in one direction than another.

And remember: if an Italian singer makes a ludicrous exhibition when he attempts *Greensleeves*, it is likely that an English singer had better steer clear of Neapolitan folk-song. Instrumental music travels better than vocal music. National character is more obvious in song, especially if it is sung in a foreign language. But no music says one thing to all countries. Not exactly.



## CHAPTER II

### THE VAGUENESS OF MUSIC

IT is a mistake to consult a text-book before one hears the music. The text-book must do its best to give you clear definitions. Very little music exactly agrees with the dictionary. Composers working in many countries in different centuries have not all worked with the same aims; they have used words in different senses; they have sought to please different audiences. The dictionary definition cannot embrace all the exceptional cases.

Even if you read a learned book devoted to one small part of music, you may feel that the explanation does not tally with the experience. This is because the author is like the botanist who can tell us everything about a flower except why it is beautiful.

How shall I avoid that difficulty in this book? I cannot do so entirely. There are times when I want to burn all the books about music and to say to people, "Listen; listen again; listen more. Now listen harder." That's all.

And let us begin with the thought that knowledge does not make us love music more: it only helps us to love more music—and, perhaps, to cease to love some things that are not worthy of our adoration.

My own established method is to ask listeners to think of composers not only as great geniuses but as professional men earning a living and solving professional problems. Also to remember that some music was not written for the pleasure of audiences. It is doubtful if Bach intended all of his forty-eight Preludes and Fugues



as performance pieces. They vary in "audience-value." Some seem like communications between one musician and another. On the other hand, there are pieces that have great audience-value but are boring to play. If you earn your living as an orchestral viola-player, what would you rather play—a *Brandenburg Concerto* or *The Blue Danube*? It is precisely the more popular piece that makes the musician say he hates music.

Thinking of music as a professional job, we are better able to understand why the word "opera" defies simple definition, why a Scarlatti sonata takes two minutes to play and a Beethoven thirty-two, why a shop-ballad resembles a Schubert *lied* and why it doesn't.

Let us begin with singing.

### CHAPTER III

## THE ORGANIZATION OF VOICES

Nobody knows how singing began. The theory that appeals most to me (it is only a speculation) is the one that declares that music arose from an attempt to make the voice dance. I like this theory because, for me, rhythm is the fundamental quality of music. It is, indeed, the fundamental quality of life. "The dead ain't got no rhythm." All primitive peoples believe that dancing promotes life and fertility, and they dance with the whole self. They could not fail to dance with the voice.

We know nothing directly of prehistoric music. We know next to nothing of the music of the great civilizations of ancient times. We know only a little of early Christian music. Many centuries ago people discovered how to write words: they failed to see how you could write music. They could, perhaps, make diagrams of where to put your fingers on an instrument (such systems are called "tablature"), but they could not make a diagram of where to put your voice. As singing was far more advanced than playing, their failure constitutes a terrible loss for us.

Fortunately, tradition is remarkably tenacious. In folk-song we have preserved some music that, at any rate, takes us back to somewhere in the Middle Ages. It remained unwritten until modern times; but a father-to-son link has kept it wonderfully uncorrupted. We musicians in all countries have seized on these melodies, arranging them and developing them, often to their detriment. In our own country the English Folk-

Song and Dance Society has published and recorded much that is as authentically presented as possible.

Some folk-song enthusiasts are deaf to the appeal of other kinds of music. Some musicians are deaf to folk-song. Some listeners prefer sham folkiness to the real thing.

Folk-song has had various kinds of influence in concert-music. In the eighteenth century a great body of music came into being that owed very little to folk-song. Though Italian music sounded Italian, and German sounded German, there was little obvious reference to the music of the peasants. The connection was subtle. Certainly you can trace a line between German folk-song and Bach's chorales, and perhaps between Croatian tunes and Haydn's themes. But Mozart seems Austrian by temperament rather than by quotation, and the *Messiah* seems so English that we have difficulty in reminding ourselves that Handel was a German who spent most of his life writing Italian opera.

If you have settled to the conviction that all great art is rooted in the soil of a composer's native country, you will somehow find folk-music in Beethoven. If you cannot find it in Bonn (where he was born) or in Vienna (where he lived his creative life), you will find it in Flanders (where his ancestors came from). But if you are not convinced in this way, you will discern the folk-influence most clearly in those countries that were added to the musical map in the nationalist period that followed the French Revolution. You will hear folk-song in the symphonies of Russia and Finland, in the tone poems of Bohemia (Czechoslovakia), in the rhapsodies of Hungary, and the ballets of Spain. In our own times you will hear them in the works of Bartók and Vaughan Williams.

Folk-song seems old; but we cannot trace it back through many centuries. We are constantly reminded that music is a new art (as we know it) compared with literature or architecture. What would we not give for a vocal score of Solomon's Song of Songs!

Some kinds of religious music also seem old; but the oldest kinds of Christian music are nothing like as old as the Church itself. Plainsong, like folksong, has its devout adherents—devout musically or devout mystically—but a vast audience of music-lovers is deaf to it. I can only direct enquiring ears to the Catholic cathedrals and to certain special recordings. The difficulty is to decide how far one's interest is musical—how far it is influenced by ritual. Those who admire the Roman ritual may easily over-estimate plainsong: those who are sceptics will wonder what all the fuss is about.

Let us be clear, however, that some such difficulty faces us in other kinds of music, too. Patriotism influences judgment in many cases. Where does a Pole place Chopin? And where does a German place him?

Medieval church-music has, however, special claims to every musician's attention. The Church had to think very seriously about music. Though Christians can be illiterate, churchmen cannot. More and more it became necessary for church musicians to devise some method of notation that would be as readable as A B C. For long years they struggled on with mere reminder-signs called *neumes*—signs that were enough to jog the memory about the ups and downs of melody. Then, in the eleventh century, a better way was found—a way usually attributed to Guido d'Arezzo. He used coloured horizontal lines and put his notes on or between them. Thus was born the graph-system that we call a *stave*. He also used a system of syllables attached to the degrees of the scales.

Is there something familiar about his *ut, re, mi, fa, sol*? Change the *ut* into *doh*, change *sol* into *soh*, add *la* and *te* and you appear to have tonic sol-fa. But the Reverend Mr. Curwen's modern system uses a movable *doh*. In England we call any note *doh* and go on from there. The same syllables used in other countries operate from a fixed *doh* (middle-C).

Both the stave and the *ut-re* system have a grave defect. The pitch-distance between the syllables is not constant. From *ut* to *re* is twice as far as from *mi* to *fa*. On the staves that most musicians use today, the pitch-distance from C to D is twice that of from E to F, though they look equivalent on paper. Hence a great many complications with sharps and flats when a scale starts from some note other than C.

You may well wonder why a better system was not found. Sheer conservatism has a lot to answer for, but our admittedly faulty system is in some ways natural. The notes in a simple chord or in a major scale have a comparatively simple ratio of vibrations. Thus the chord C-E-G has vibrations in this order: for every four vibrations in C there are five in E and six in G. When we sing the notes of a five-finger exercise we are hardly conscious that E to F is half of the distance from F to G. The piano manufacturer, of course, knows it full well. He can put a black note between F and G. He cannot between E and F.

It is not just tradition and obstinacy that have preserved the essentials of Guido d'Arezzo's system with only small modifications.

All this talk of notation may seem out of place in a chapter headed "The Organization of Voices," but it was

precisely the invention of notation that made such organization possible.

The musicians, of course, had to notate time as well as pitch. Everyone with a sense of rhythm has the ability to set an imaginary pendulum swinging inside himself. This pendulum is adjustable. Our sense of rhythm can swing like a grandfather-clock pendulum. It can tick like a wrist-watch. The whole system of beats, half beats, quarter beats, and so on, relates itself to whatever pendulum we choose.

Rhythm is one thing; tempo another. It is a pity that the word "time" is sometimes used to mean an arrangement of beats and sub-beats, and sometimes used to mean speed. What do you mean when you say of a piece of music "At this point the time changes"? Do you mean it has changed from two-time to three-time, or do you mean that *lento* changes to *presto*?

Nowadays we can fix both pitch and duration. The instrument-makers and the radio authorities can have an international agreement about the exact number of vibrations in middle-C or in the A to which orchestras tune. Composers can specify the duration of time between one beat and the next by means of an adjustable clockwork pendulum called a metronome. In ancient times they had to be more vague. But the note we now call middle-C (in some countries it is still *ut*) was kept somewhere near constant by the fact that it was supposed to be the middle note of a whole choir, reckoning from the bottom note of an average bass voice to the top note of an average soprano. It varied a little, of course, throughout the ages. Some of the classical choral music that seems to strain the voices of today was easier in the days when pitch was a trifle lower. On the other hand,



forty years ago there was a "concert pitch" that was higher than domestic pitch.

Why do we refer everything to C rather than to A? The briefest explanation must suffice. If we play white-note scales on the piano, the only one that seems quite normal is the one that starts from C. A white-note scale from D to D' or from A to A' seems a little strange.

In the Middle Ages they had a great variety of "modes." Some turned out to be comparatively unsuitable for melodies. The two that survived best were the scales that we now call A B C D E F G and C D E F G A B. The countries that call their mid-note *ut* or *do* backed the winner. We who now have to call it C backed the loser. It is a nuisance that the major scale without sharps or flats should be called C-major.

Longer books than this must deal with the slow evolution of choral music in the late Middle Ages. The point for us is that, with notation, music could be composed rather than improvised. And it could be carried on simultaneously at different levels.

The early experiments seem crude to us. Suppose you sing a tune starting on C and someone else sings the same tune at the same time starting on G. This would give you some notion of an early method called *organum*. It is only fair to our forefathers to point out that the effect of this method on a modern tune is quite different from the one produced when the two voices sing an ancient and slow church melody with its own proper gravity.

Gradually organum gave way to something more flexible. Though still governed by strict rules, the voices achieved a measure of independence. No longer did they move in parallel motion. No longer did the rhythms



keep in step. Though the *canto fermo* might seem to be more important than the melodic lines traced by attendant voices, there was a proper distribution of interest throughout the choir. Basses were not merely accompanying the tenors. Altos were not just "singing second" to the trebles.

A great deal of church music was composed and performed that now interests only the scholars and historians, but the Renaissance saw the great triumphs of *polyphony*.

Palestrina in Italy, Orlando de Lassus in Germany, Victoria in Spain, and William Byrd in England produced the undying masterpieces that are among the greatest artistic achievements of the Roman faith. In fact, their masses were part of the Counter-Reformation and were intended to rally the faithful against the heresies of Protestantism.

Today, Protestant and freethinker alike can feel love and reverence for these great works, and are as anxious to have them beautifully performed as they are to preserve the fabric of a great cathedral.

To keep company with the great religious works we have the small, domestic madrigals. Some are serious, some tender and romantic, some gallant, but we remember many of them as light-hearted—sung with a fa-la-la and a hey-nonny-no. The madrigal is, in fact, a pastime. The more educated Elizabethans would sit round a table singing from parts that had been handed out to them, much as educated people of today sit round a table and play bridge.

Remember that polyphony is music in which voices go along in company. Wherever the music stops, the voices (if they are all singing) must produce a chord. But this is not chord-conscious music. The harmonies are simple and pure, and contain hardly any discords.

(A dissonance or discord is one that exists in a state of uneasiness and seems to ask to be "resolved" into a more restful concord or consonance.)

Though the word "polyphony" could apply to any kind of choral music in which each section of a choir has interesting music to sing, it is customarily applied to the religious music and the madrigals of Renaissance times. For later kinds of choral music, based on a new conception of harmony, we generally use the word *counterpoint*. Certain kinds of instrumental music, if written in definite parts or "voices," are also called contrapuntal. Particularly fugues.

However, before we consider the musical triumphs of the Reformation, let us turn to opera.

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE BEGINNINGS OF OPERA

It is hard to remember that there was a time when the Italians had scant respect for the ancient Romans. The Romans were heathens, their gods idols. Gradually the medieval fear of anything pagan dwindled. People became curious about the past.

Byzantine refugees from Turkish invasions settled in Italy, bringing with them ancient Greek manuscripts. Here was further cause for curiosity.

Venetian merchants and Florentine bankers were spending great sums on palaces, on works of art, on entertainments. (They were unaware as yet that the iron curtain of Islam in the east and the discovery of America in the west would send commerce out of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic.)

The great people of the old civilizations—how did *they* live? These Greek plays, for instance . . . weren't they chanted or sung in some way? Galileo's father and his friend, Giovanni Bardi, Count of Vernio, persuaded a poet named Rinucci and a composer named Peri to contrive a play in what they hoped was the Greek manner. The words were delivered in a declamatory melody called "recitative." It was all unprofessional and experimental, but *Dafne* (1597) marks the beginning of great events.

Why this kind of entertainment should be called Opera is a mystery. Opera simply means "a work." Melodrama would be a better word, but that has taken another meaning.

For a long time after these early experiments, opera

composers were inclined to choose ancient Greek and Roman myths as subject-matter, but they soon gave up any attempt to find out what ancient Greek music may have been like. They were busy solving the fundamental problems of music in the theatre. These problems have brought forth various solutions in different times. They are never finally disposed of.

The fact is that poetic rhythm and musical rhythm do not agree. In poetry you have simple rhythms that can be delivered with great variety and flexibility. In music you have varied rhythms that must be observed with discipline and precision. In poetry the pitch is indeterminate; in music you are damned if you sing out of tune. The trained voice of a singer dwells on vowels as a poet's never would. The singer utters fewer words per minute than an actor does, and cannot make long or involved sentences intelligible. If there is any tussle between words and music, it is the music that acts the bully. (Many poets have hated songs.)

Comparatively early a solution of this difficulty was found that remained serviceable over a long period. It was to tell the story quickly and freely over a very light accompaniment, singing in quick syllables and aiming at intelligibility (this is the recitative), and then to express one's feelings with gravity and formality in a slow melody called *aria*. In the *aria* the music is everything. For its sake, generations of singers underwent prolonged and rigorous training to acquire *bel canto*. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the barbarous custom of castration was practised on selected boys so that they should grow up as male sopranis. Some of these castrati had voices that were regarded with extravagant admiration, and some grew very rich.

Though every opera (or almost every opera) has its

chorus, we go primarily to hear the soloists. In the opera-house we do not ask for polyphony—a serene style. We want action and emotion. Harmony (concord and discord) must no longer arise merely out of the conjunction of voices. It is something self-important provided by instruments, by an orchestra. The chords accompany the voice, they give new meaning to the notes of the melody, they have their own emotional value.

This is the kind of music that is most popular with audiences. Polyphony can never have such audience-value. The only choral music that can compete with operatic music is the dramatic-biblical kind—the crises of the Bible stories set to music. Handel's oratorios are the supreme examples; and observe that Handel was an operatic composer and that his religious works "feature" recitatives and arias for soloists that are not markedly different from his operatic arias.

Seeing that opera is of so many kinds and is still evolving, it is surprising that it developed certain enduring conventions so soon.

Throughout the ages few operas have dispensed with an overture. In the early days the overture had little reference to what followed. An overture by Lully was more concerned to welcome Louis XIV to the opera-house than to create the mood of the story. How the overture became more linked to the story is an ironical episode. Gluck wanted to humanize opera which had seemed to him too formal, too static, too like a concert in costume. Though he was famous in Vienna, he thought his new ideas would find more favour in Paris. The ideas that would presently provoke the French Revolution were already current, and Gluck thought that his new style of opera would flourish in this climate of

opinion. Oddly enough, he was befriended by the ex-Austrian Marie Antoinette, and this was enough to make him suspect to the revolutionaries.

It is a long jump in history from Renaissance Italy to pre-revolutionary France, but I have made it because we so seldom hear opera from the seventeenth century or from the early eighteenth. It is true we hear a great many arias taken from Handel's operas—hearing them sometimes with new words and new titles (e.g., "Where'er you walk")—but we find it hard to re-create the whole of these works convincingly. In England we are so accustomed to the oratorio-Handel that we transform *Ombra mai fu* into a solemn organ-piece that we call Handel's *Largo*. That, perhaps, is typically English; but the Germans and the Italians are as little likely as we to mount a full-scale Handel opera.

Gluck is still occasionally heard; but the operatic composer who eclipses all others in the eighteenth century is Mozart. Looking further back, we may find splendours in Purcell or in Monteverdi, but Mozart is nobody's forerunner; we do not have to have our attention drawn to him.

† In many ways he seems an un-revolutionary composer. As an infant prodigy he had seemed set fair for a glittering career among his aristocratic patrons. Fame came, but not money or security. He did the expected things: operas with Italian words and classical stories. He did unexpected things: operas with German words containing forbidden opinions. (*Zauberflöte*—the Magic Flute—is in German and deals with freemasonry, never a safe subject in a Catholic country.) He dared to write *The Marriage of Figaro*, based on a banned Beaumarchais play that seemed too disrespectful to the aristocracy. His *Don Giovanni* is consigned to the flames of Hell.

The music is urbane, never more aristocratic than when the stage aristocrats are misbehaving themselves. It is designed to be sung with the utmost refinement, to be played by an orchestra of artists, and to be given in a small theatre. For many people, Mozart's operas have just the right combination of formality and freedom. What you will not find in them are the violent passions that belong to later generations of opera. Dignity and wit forbid ferocity and long-windedness.

Rossini at his best belongs to the same world. Compare *The Barber of Seville* with *The Marriage of Figaro*, and one finds Rossini more hearty and gay, but less magical. But, then, Rossini was an accommodating sort of man. He wasn't buried in a pauper's grave.

Let opera pause at this point. Let us consider the problems of counterpoint and harmony and then of form.



## CHAPTER V

### THE MATERIAL OF MUSIC—(I) COUNTER-POINT

**T**HOUGH you will often hear that a composer was inspired by this or that—by love or religion or patriotism—it is also true that music is to some degree a self-fertilizing process. I say “to some degree” since music does not literally exist “out of this world,” and the world must affect it. But music inspires music, and arises from a strange battle with intangible material. How shall I make this melody run with that? How shall I proceed from the major in three sharps to the minor in four? What shall I do about this flute-like melody that seems to want to dive down for a moment below the flute’s lowest note? How shall I write a variation on this theme that shall seem both *on* it and free of it?

These and a thousand other questions harass and entice the composer.

Sometimes they entice the composer too much, so that the music has only a professional interest. Medieval polyphony was sometimes too scholastic. We demand that music should not cease to be human just because it is ingenious. A children’s “round” or *canon* (e.g., *London’s Burning*) is acceptable because it is a game.

In many pieces of music we feel we can examine the workmanship as a separate aspect of the music, admiring the transition here, the modulation there, and the development somewhere else. These acts of workmanship seem in some way apart from inspiration, though they serve to express it.

This is a reasonable enough attitude, since in some kinds of art (architecture and furniture, for example) we are accustomed to seeing one man design the object and another execute it. Sometimes, however, the struggle with the material of music takes place in a condition of inspiration. Ingenuity is no longer mere skill or cunning: it is a revelation of the innermost processes of music. It is then that we realize that music is not constructed: it grows. The composer lives it.

Such a composer was Bach. In South Germany he was far removed from the wealthy centres of opera. He worked for princely patrons, but they were minor princelings. When he deserted them to become an organist and choirmaster, he had to produce a great deal out of small resources. Like the polyphonic composers, he thought in lines. Sometimes, it is true, in his harpsichord music you will find a foreshadowing of pianism; but much of the keyboard music is an adaptation of choral method written in a stated number of "voices" or parts—even the dance-music of the suites and partitas. Yet what distinguishes his part-writing from polyphony is his sense of harmony. The harmony is only occasionally set forth for itself alone. When it is, it astounds us, as in the Chromatic Fantasy. These bold, "modern" chords supporting that free, romantic declamation!

Most of the music is contrapuntal. Only a truly extraordinary genius could produce such human music from so many ingenuities. Sometimes the voices of a choir or the so-called voices in a keyboard piece seem to move about in a jagged course in the effort to embrace the bold harmonies. Sometimes the chords seem to be set out in a way that looks like part-writing on paper, but does not sound like it in performance. These are

the moments when the creative struggle becomes apparent. But most of the time we seem to be witnessing through our ears the process that Bernard Shaw called Creative Evolution.

What is a fugue? A fugue begins with a "subject"—a line of unaccompanied notes. We speak of a voice singing this subject, but the voice may be a whole section of a choir (all the basses, perhaps), or it may be a bass line in an instrumental piece. It may be played by the cellos of an orchestra or by the last three fingers of your left hand on a keyboard. No matter: it is a voice or part.

The subject finished, it reappears in another voice and at a new level. If we began with the bass voice, we may now have the tenor voice singing the subject at its new level. The first voice now sings a counterpoint. (In some fugues this counterpoint reappears every time the subject reappears: it is then called a countersubject.) When the two voices have come to the end of the subject-with-counterpoint there may be a few free bars taking us towards the new level at which the third voice will enter with the subject. And so on, for as many voices or parts as the composer has decided to use.

If you read a treatise on fugue you will find that the subject is in certain circumstances called an "answer"; you will find that after the assembling of the parts we come to "middle entries." Do not burden your memory with these words. They add little to your enjoyment or understanding. But do listen to fugues until you can hear each reappearance of the subject, perceiving it amidst the attendant voices, perceiving it even when Bach makes it enter in double-length notes (augmentation), in half-length notes (diminution), or by

inversion. An inversion makes the voice jump down exactly as far as it previously jumped up, and vice versa



If this is inverted it becomes



As you listen, marvel that this music is so seldom a mere puzzle. The great choral fugues have never been surpassed as declarations of religious faith, and are often wonderfully descriptive and dramatic. How this is so I cannot tell—nor, I imagine, can anyone else.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MATERIAL OF MUSIC—(2) FORM

**I**N almost all the music we have been discussing so far something besides the music has been going on: polyphony with ritual, opera with acting, oratorio with worship.

Words and action go far to determine the shape and continuity of music. An opera or an oratorio may seem a big work, but it consists to a great extent of an assembly of small ones: recitative and aria; chorus; duet; and so on.

Much of this music was written for princes—princes of the Church and the sort of prince or king who said, *L'état c'est moi*. The aristocrats, who employed musicians much as they employed secretaries, architects, cooks, gardeners, and huntsmen, wanted music of various kinds—dinner music and after-dinner music and garden music and ballroom music. And so the composers had to face this problem: how does one write music that will regale their lordships for a reasonable length of time *without* words, worship, dancing, or acting?

Fugues, it is true, have their own way of generating continuing growth, but fugues are intricate and learned in a way that was not always to the taste of the ladies and gentlemen who paid the piper. A collection of dance-pieces can be acceptable even when performed outside the ballroom: to this day we regard Bach's suites and partitas as concert music, though almost every piece is a dance. Indeed, long before Bach, the Elizabethans had collected dance-pieces into suites. Yes, that was another way of writing music for entertainment.

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Yet another way was to compose pieces that would feature a certain player or group of players in the princely orchestra—the Brandenburg concertos are just such pieces.

But suites and serenades and concertos were still collections of little works rather than truly big ones. The tiny keyboard pieces that Scarlatti called sonatas, the descriptive miniatures of Couperin left the problem unsolved.

Two of Bach's sons, John Christian and Carl Philip Emmanuel, turning away from father's learned style, began to grope towards some method of cultivating or constructing larger movements. (Friedemann Bach could have helped them, but he took to drink.) And so we come to the beginnings of "Sonata Form," and the convention that a sonata should be big.

Some people use the expression to apply to a whole sonata, some apply it to a method of writing a particular movement, usually the first. Let us consider the particular "first movement form." Here is the basic scheme :

- |                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| EXPOSITION     | { | <i>Slow introduction</i> leading to <i>First Subject</i> . A bridge-passage links with a group of <i>Second Subjects</i> (not in the same key as the first).<br>A "semi-final" end-piece called "coda" completes the "Exposition." |
| DEVELOPMENT    | { | Now a <i>development</i> of the themes and perhaps some free <i>episode</i> .  |
| RECAPITULATION | { | <i>First Subject</i> . A modified bridge leads to the group of <i>Second Subjects</i> (now in the same key as the first).<br>An end-piece called <i>coda</i> .   |

This plan allows a great deal of freedom. The introduction can be of any length. Indeed, it can be of no length, and the movement can begin with the principal theme. The exposition can be repeated, and nearly always *was* repeated in the eighteenth century. The development can concern itself closely with the first subject, or it can bestow importance on some passing thought that you hardly noticed in the exposition. It can be free and episodic if it prefers. The recapitulation is likely to be much like the exposition, allowing for the key-changes. The coda, like the introduction, can be of any length, from a few closing chords to a substantial after-thought.

This is the form that was most often to be discerned in the first movement of a piano-sonata, or of a piece of chamber-music, or of a symphony. Haydn, having done as much as anyone to establish the form, kept it clear. You nearly always know where you are in a Haydn movement. Haydn's music (Mozart's, too) seems signposted.

Beethoven began with the same clarity, but, being a different sort of person, living in a revolutionary period, and employing larger resources and improved instruments, he dealt more freely and violently and capriciously with the form. Thereafter some composers were strict and some free. Nearly all remembered something of what they had learned when, as students, they had analysed Haydn and Mozart symphonies and sonatas. To this day we still expect to find the general outline—an exposition of ideas, a development of them, and a return.

I have never thought that a close study of form is of importance to the listener. The composer, yes; he must wrestle with form, or else be content to write small



pieces. The critic and scholar must probe into processes. The performer must play page 1 with some reference to what is going to happen later. But the listener gets to know his way through a symphony much as a season-ticket holder gets to know the scenery on his line, without needing to know plans and maps. In some pieces the lie of the land is not quickly apparent, and it does not become familiar until after several journeys. The earlier sonatas and symphonies, laid out like a formal garden, make their design clear at a glance, but this does not mean that they soon become boring. For everyday living, some people prefer a fine garden to any amount of dramatic scenery.

The garden simile is not a bad one. You can make a garden, but you cannot make flowers—you can only cultivate them. Composing is at one moment a process of cultivation of something that seems to germinate by some natural process that is independent of you. At another moment it seems an act of deliberate construction, cutting down here, extending there, and arranging somewhere else. Without talent you are always a constructor, and the "flowers" in your garden turn out on inspection to be artificial ones stuck in for show.

When I was a little boy and first began to play Haydn and Beethoven sonatas (the easier ones), I noticed that in a six-page movement the first two pages had a lot of tunes, the next two contained a lot of different music, not so tune-y, and the last two were much the same as the first two, except that some of the tunes were now higher or lower on the keyboard.

A slow movement did not bring its form to my notice very much, unless it were something obvious, like a theme and variations.

A leisurely minuet-and-trio, or a fast scherzo-and-trio, were easy. Three in a bar, and a *da capo* (return to the beginning) after the trio. The only thing that puzzled me was the word "trio," which surely meant something for three instruments. I did not know that in early times it was customarily played by three instruments and that the name just stayed on.

The final rondo was usually a cheerful movement in which the first tune kept on coming back. I did not then distinguish between "old rondo" and "sonata-rondo." If you are curious to know the difference, it is this :

Old Rondo : A B A C A D A etc. (A being the principal theme.)

Sonata Rondo : A B A ; a central episode ; A B coda. (The two Bs are not in the same key.)

What I discovered about sonatas in childhood was the basic truth about their construction. It did not bother me later on to find that first-movement-form might occur in a last movement, or that late-Beethoven sonatas were too rhapsodic to be analysable, or that some composers (Liszt, for example) should try to telescope three movements into one. What did surprise me was to find the remarkable adaptability of this general scheme for such a vast body of solo, chamber, and symphonic music.

Talking of late Beethoven and Liszt, we have once again leapt ahead. Let us go back to remind ourselves that Haydn's and Mozart's forms were devised for the pleasure of aristocratic audiences. Often these audiences were quite small, and then the occasion called for intimate "room-music" played by musicians partly for their own pleasure and partly for a few listeners who were probably themselves players. This is what we call chamber-music. It has never become widely popular : it was never

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intended to be. Nowadays it achieves its largest audience by radio. You see, a radio audience is not really a large audience : it is a large number of very small audiences. The success of "Music in Miniature" arose from playing room-music (very well) to people in rooms.

In talking of form I have avoided such technical words as Binary and Ternary. *God Save the King* is a binary tune (A B). The *Vicar of Bray* is ternary (A B A). The fact that the Vicar's first A is sung twice is worth noting. A A B A seems to give the tune a symmetry it might otherwise lack. In passing, observe this as a frequent design :

|                   |                               |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Minuet A B—binary | } The general design ternary. |
| Trio A B—binary   |                               |
| Minuet A B—binary |                               |

## CHAPTER VII

### REVOLUTION

REVOLUTIONS of one kind or another are always going on in music. Some composers are naturally experimental, and will find new ways of composing even in times when the musical scene seems peaceful. Others steer their way through a stormy period, doing their best to dodge the issues. For this reason, one sometimes becomes impatient with the usual divisions of history into clearly marked periods.

Bach in some ways was a traditionalist, probing deep into the science of part-writing at the very moment when it was becoming unfashionable. But he effected several technical revolutions, causing us all to tune our keyboards with twelve exactly equal semitones in the octave and making all scales equally (and imperceptibly) out of tune. A generation or two had to go by before other composers were as bold as he in writing a piece in, say, seven sharps.

Purcell often amazes us by his harmonic boldness, though he is earlier than Bach and was almost a frontiersman in comparison with the French and Italian musicians.

We are told that Mozart laughed at the idea of being original—that he was content to write customary music with unaccustomed skill; yet his operas seem less old-fashioned than many that were written later.

Beethoven, on the other hand, is held up as a true child of revolution, yet well on into the nineteenth century he remained in some respects an eighteenth-century character, much as Bernard Shaw remained a Victorian.

Still, we cannot abandon the usual periods. What we

have to do is to remember that no rules have more exceptions than musical ones.

Beethoven earned his living as an independent free-lance. He never took service. It is true he had to be polite to aristocratic patrons, dedicating his works to them and receiving money gifts in return. He enjoyed their hospitality, but without the careful formalities that earlier composers had had to observe. He sold his music to publishers, often after bitter wranglings. He accepted commissions from people of less than noble rank. (Members of the Philharmonic Society in London were not all aristocrats.)

Whether we regard him as better or worse off depends on whose story we like to choose as typical. The Haydn story makes us think well of aristocratic patronage. The Mozart story makes us angry. Admiration and anger are both a waste of emotion. There are some changes in history that, on reflection, seem as natural as a cosmic event. It is no use being angry with spots on the sun or the coming and going of the Ice Age.

The too-regal monarchs and the unbearably grand grandees found themselves challenged. England's Great Rebellion had made it impossible for English kings to rule despotically. America's revolution had laid the foundations of what was to become the most powerful republic in the world. Now the French Revolution set all Europe ablaze.

It was inevitable that Beethoven should write pieces to serve the cause of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. That he could do this and still be friends with certain aristocrats is not strange to anyone but a fanatic.

In his early days he was a "fellow-traveller." His third symphony was intended as a Napoleon symphony.



It needed a coronation to make Beethoven see *L'Empereur* clearly. Imagine the effect of a Stalin coronation on Comrade X, and one can understand why the third symphony was re-entitled *Sinfonia Eroica*. Beethoven thereafter bestowed his admiration on England, even though the Workshop of the World of those days was no more a Utopia than is today's U.S.A. the Arsenal of Democracy.

I recount these matters not to be condescending to Beethoven, but rather to make it clear that he faced something like our problems. Later, in the post-Napoleonic period, when many problems remained unsolved, when Capitalism was busy challenging aristocratic rule and suppressing the working classes, there were other composers whose music reminds us of nationalist struggles, of *coups d'état*, of racial and economic tensions.

It would be a bold man who would set out to describe just what a Beethoven sonata or symphony is. In the early works the form is still Haydn's, but a fiercer wind of emotion blows through them. Beethoven seldom gave a title to his sonatas and symphonies, but many could have been called *eroica*. Almost all his other works—the descriptive orchestral ones, that is—seem to praise the hero against tyranny. (I include Leonora, who is a heroine.)

As we go through the opus numbers in the sonatas we find that the form is subject to all sorts of extensions and compressions. "Transitional material" is developed as though it were "thematic." Introductions and codas are sometimes long and thoughtful, sometimes mere shouts of "begin" and "finish." An occasional title such as *Pathétique* (in the old sublime sense of the word) or *Appassionata* or "Funeral March on the Death



of a Hero " gives us a reminder of a general trend of thought.

But as we get to Beethoven's "Third Period" we enter a more remote region. The heroic titles disappear. The music becomes sometimes deeply reflective, sometimes impatient and convulsive, often unaccountable. The deaf and lonely old bachelor whose behaviour often made people touch their foreheads significantly left a legacy of late music that, while it repels the easy-going listener, compels some of us to offer homage.

The symphonies end with the choral section of the Ninth. This music on the brotherhood of Man belongs to the heroic Beethoven, though it shows many Third Period characteristics.

The chamber-music goes on and on As Far as Thought can Reach (to borrow a phrase from Shaw).

Beethoven's technical revolution is largely a matter of controlling larger resources, louder pianos, bigger orchestras, instruments of improved range and agility. The vast concert-halls of today were not yet in existence, but the music seems designed, prophetically, for them.

If you like dramatic and romantic and stirring music, you will feel that Beethoven's music represents an advance. If you think that drama and romance and story-telling destroy the truly musical qualities you will have reservations about his and a great deal of other nineteenth-century music. All that one can say with certainty is that an active and enthusiastic listener is likely to go through several phases. He will begin by understanding only certain kinds of music, quite likely adopting Beethoven and Tchaikovsky as his favourites; he will develop a more catholic taste; he may then lose this catholicity as some people lose their taste for

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foods that pleased their palates when they were young. Some people (they irritate me) become faddy. "My dear fellow, you can't *really* enjoy César Franck!"

Beethoven's music constitutes an arch that carries us from Haydn and Mozart to . . . whom? To Schubert, who was a pall-bearer at Beethoven's funeral, and who, himself, died a year later.

The older composers never wrote such a multitude of songs as Schubert. An aria from an opera or an oratorio or a cantata is not what the ordinary person ordinarily calls a song. A folk-song *is*, in this sense, a song—a simple melody with simple words about life and death, true and faithless lovers, children, legends, and love of one's country. But a folk-song is somehow apart from other kinds of music. You cannot compose new folk-songs. Even providing accompaniments for them is done at your peril.

I cannot pretend that Schubert is the "onlie begetter" of the "ordinary song" with piano accompaniment. Some of the early Italian and English songs, originally with accompaniment for lute or virginals, sound charming and romantic played on the piano. Certain songs with harpsichord accompaniment can be stored on the same shelf. Beethoven wrote some songs with piano accompaniment. But we come back to Schubert as the man whose *lieder* (*lied*, by the way, merely means *song*) are the first cascades of an unending torrent of song—the songs of Schumann, Brahms, and Wolf, of Debussy and Duparc and Fauré, of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, of Grieg, of Somervell and Quilter and Vaughan Williams and Britten. . . .

Some years ago the songs of Schubert were borrowed to make the music of an operetta called *Lilac Time*. This

served to make clear—if we needed any convincing—that Schubert's songs are also the forerunners of much that we hear in musical comedy and technicolor "musicals." We hear echoes of Schubert in the Victorian "shop ballads." We hear them in every kind of ballroom music except true jazz. The clear spring-water of Schubert's music has grown into a broad and perhaps flavoursome river.

The times were propitious for Schubert's art. There were already in existence plenty of poems of the right size and kind. The piano was no longer an experimental apparatus: it had largely ousted the harpsichord and had developed certain "singing" qualities of its own, despite its essentially percussive nature. There were publishers. They strike us as sharks, but they published. There was a public of middle-class amateurs and new-style professionals who needed just such music as this. Modest Schubert, always poor and often unhappy, but generally a good companion among his easy-going friends, scattered a great largesse of hundreds of songs. He scattered many song-like melodies in his symphonies and sonatas and chamber-music. Oddly enough, he proved to be no operatic composer.

In his *lieder* and in those of others who followed him we discover that if a great song contains great words, the conjunction is largely coincidental. If a great poet like Heine is able to supply the clear sentiments, the simple words and short sentences, the effective point to the implied story—well, that is very nice for Schumann and for us. But there are poets as great as Heine whose complex diction defeats the song-writer, and there are lesser poets who have enjoyed a scarce-merited immortality because their words were just right for the purposes of song.

This explains why in "popular" music the composer often does not set a poem. He composes a catchy tune, and then employs a lyric-writer to supply some singable words. After all, many people do not understand the German words of Schubert's songs and are as content to hear the melodies on a violin as to hear them sung. In theory a great song should be a perfect marriage between words and music. In practice we care most for the music, and merely thank the poet for having provided a stimulating challenge to the composer.



## STORY-MUSIC AND THE ORCHESTRA

IT is hard to judge the beauty of a word on the basis of pure sound. If "leprosy" were the name of a flower, you would cull a posy of it in every one of the poems to your sweetheart. If there were a disease called "chronic Isabella," you would grimace at the very mention of it. Indeed, the only way to judge a word purely by sound is to listen to a foreign word of which you don't know the meaning and try to decide whether it sounds agreeable. We do something like this when we say that Russian and Italian are nice languages for singers, though we know little or nothing of these languages.

With music it is different. Music can be judged for itself alone. But not for long. Though music has no precise meaning, it has lived in the world so long as to have acquired associations. Compose a "trilly" sort of melody and you may remind someone of dicky-birds. Have it played on a warbling instrument—say a flute—and you are on the way to composing a piece called Woodland Scenes. On the other hand, compose a tune that runs from lower soh through doh and me to upper soh, and you may remind someone of armies or huntsmen. Assign your tune to a trumpet, and you have a fragment of a warrior piece.

But observe that you cannot make music really definite in its meaning (not unless your orchestration is one of those occasional conjuring tricks that give us the illusion of listening to a waterfall or a puffer-train). The definition, in nearly all cases, lies in the title or in



the "programme." It is for the title to say whether your woodland scene is to be called "In the Forest of Arden" or "Springtime in the Alps," whether your warrior piece is a "Crusader's March" or the "Return of the Commandos."

It is true that a skilful composer can make some difference between Warwickshire and the Oberland or between the twelfth and twentieth centuries in the Eastern Mediterranean, but only to a certain degree. Perform your piece without title and ask for suggestions from your audience, and you will get a thousand different answers.

This being so, it is all the more amazing to discover the genuine power of "programme music." Each piece depends for its effect on your knowing the title, or something of the background story, yet *with* that title it can give you the deepest satisfaction. We may know perfectly well that the sea never literally sounds like Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture, but we are still infallibly transported to Fingal's Cave. In some strange way Mendelssohn's music stirs the same emotions in us as we feel when we watch the breakers pounding against a rocky shore. — You and I have never ridden magic steeds through the clouds, but Wagner can tell us just how we should feel if we were Valkyries riding up to Valhalla.

What are the musician's resources when he writes story music? First there is the music of native speech. This helps to fix the geographical point. I cannot easily describe in words (unless I talk of the falling leading-note and the plagal cadence) just why a Norwegian tune is different from a Russian one, but in practice it is easy enough to invent "characteristic" tunes. Your tunes or mine would not be as good as Grieg's or Borodin's, but they could be quite recognizable as having—even if

vaguely—a locality. We shall see in our chapter on Nationalism just how potent this trick could become. Some composers have written what is almost a dialect-music (think of the Spanish composers), others have somehow universalized their native musical language (think of Chopin). Mendelssohn was able to write *Fingal's Cave* without once using a Hebridean melody.

While it is true that native musical-speech generally comes best from native composers, we have to admit that some very fine Spanish music was written by Debussy, Ravel, and Bizet—all Frenchmen. Bizet's *Carmen* was composed to a story written by Prosper Mérimée. Whatever it may sound like to Spaniards, it sounds mighty Spanish to us.

Brahms, a north German, wrote Hungarian Dances; Tchaikovsky, a Russian, wrote an Italian Caprice; Bax, an Englishman, has written some of the best Irish music; and many composers of all nations have had a go at writing oriental music.

A variety of rhythms are available to the story-book composer: the quick-march and the funeral march; the Viennese waltz and the slow, sentimental, moonlit sort of waltz; Highland rhythms, Gypsy rhythms, castanet rhythms, balalaika rhythms.

Period presents a peculiar problem. Richard Strauss wrote twentieth-century German music whether he was dealing with Zarathustra, Salome, Electra, or Don Juan. Wagner wrote nineteenth-century German music for his mostly medieval stories. The eighteenth-century composers wrote their own kind of music for Orpheus, Isis and Osiris, and St. Matthew. Very little music of the greatest kind has been fake-antique. We would rather hear Handel's *Messiah* than any scholarly imitation of temple music.

Tempo plays its part; also what one may call the gait of the music—whether it suggests dignity or impudence. And then we come to the voices of the orchestra.

Long before orchestras became highly organized there were certain settled conventions about voices. A villain is a bass; a lover and hero is a tenor; a mother is a contralto; an innocent maid is a soprano. There are exceptions—fewer than with most musical rules.

In the orchestra villainy is still in the bass department, but so is a gruff humour. Innocence is still treble. Love throbs in the strings: war blares in the brass. Both peevishness and malice belong to the oboe—so does reflective sorrow. Turn your oboe into a cor anglais: the bigger, deeper instrument seems more magical. Turn the cor anglais into a bassoon, and you begin to get an old-man sound. All three instruments are built on the same principle of tone production and employ a double reed.

Trumpet and trombone are brothers. Though the trumpet uses valves and the trombone slides, they have a similar way of producing sound from the lips in the cupped mouthpiece (no reeds here). But the trumpet is better able than the trombone to vary its character. It can have less of defiance and more of dignity. It can give us a smooth, legato melody.

Neither instrument is much inclined to blend with others. The french-horn can both blare and blend. Blaring, it is not as powerful as trumpet or trombone, but it is weighty and exciting enough. Playing more gently, it can merge in with wood-wind or with strings. If a theatre orchestra lacks the four horns of a symphony orchestra, the spaces can easily be filled by clarinet and bassoon.

The horns are enormously useful for sustaining middle harmony. They are to the orchestra what the sustaining pedal is to the piano.

The horns are very co-operative. So is the clarinet. It can go a long way up into the flute region and some way down into bassoon depths. It has one reed, compared with two for oboe and bassoon and none for flute, and is the most versatile member of its family. The flute, by the way, produces its tone much as you can produce sound by blowing across the top of an open milk-bottle, but the instrument is held across the mouth.

The strings scarcely need discussion. Everyone knows that violins are massed into two cohorts, firsts and seconds; that the violas have a "darker" quality of sound. Everyone knows the eloquent cello and the heavy-footed double-basses.

I would be inclined to make the rough-and-ready generalization that in story-music the music comes from the strings and the story from wood, brass, and percussion. I emphasize "rough and ready," but the fact is that a concert by a string orchestra contains few descriptive pieces, while a concert that needs extra wind and percussion players is likely to contain many.

However descriptive or evocative music may be, it has to be music first. The purely picturesque sounds that we get from, say, triangles, castanets, xylophones, and other "kitchen-instruments" can only be used sparingly. For a trumpet to blare defiance is all very well, but it must be playing music at the same time. For a bassoon to pretend to be a magic broomstick is very amusing, but we demand a memorable tune. The harp cadenza must satisfy our sense of harmony, the violas must thread

their lines of counterpoint, the kettle-drums must be tuned according to the key of the piece.

Mere effects-music soon becomes tiresome, and so we are inclined after a while to say that titles and programmes are unimportant and that a piece must stand or fall according to our purely musical judgment.

Yet this would be a mistake. The processes of inspiration and composition are very obscure. If we could psycho-analyse an apparently pure piece of music we should be quite likely to find that one phrase owed something to a smile on a face, another to a dancer's gesture, another to the phrasing of a nursery rhyme, another to the cry of an animal. In "pure" music these things are buried deep in the unconscious and reappear much changed; but without them pure music would become mere music—so much fiddle-de-dee.

A case in point: Chopin believed that his music was rooted in unhappiness—that if his love-affairs had gone more happily he would have written less, and less well. Yet how difficult it is to find definite stories in his music.

I must not leave the orchestra without a word about "transposing" instruments. What is a horn in F or a trumpet in B-flat?

Amateur pianists will sometimes tell you that they would rather play in C-major than in a key full of sharps or flats. What they mean is that they would rather *read* in C-major. Playing is often as easy on black notes as on white. This, however, is not true with some other instruments. Go into "remote" keys and you find that the notes become very awkward under the fingers. What happens then is that the player picks up another instrument of a different size and compass. What feels

like C-major under his fingers sounds like B-flat major to your ears. This is the principle of the thing. By picking up the correct instrument he can enjoy the eye-comfort and finger-comfort of an easy key while actually producing the notes of a difficult one. The composer, of course, has some extra calculations to do, and he must allow time for the changes; but the listener need not bother his head about why B-flat, A, and F are the most common transpositions. Playing-technique, instrument-making, the forces of history, and general cussedness have all played their part in determining these things.



## NATIONALISM

SOME people just happen to be English: some are God's Englishmen. For some people America is America; for others it is the land of the free and the home of the brave. Some people have a hidden patriotism, some an exposed patriotism. To most people of today, patriotism seems natural, whether it takes the form of a quiet love of your own garden or a fierce contempt for foreigners. We find it hard to remember that there have been great people who had no strong feelings on this subject.

Music reminds us. The great musicians who lived on princely patronage were often as ready to accept one prince as another. Handel emigrated from Germany to learn the trade of opera in Italy. He could have stayed there. After a brief return to Germany he settled in England, and lies buried in Westminster Abbey. How does *The Messiah* strike you—German, Italian, or English?

Bach wrote English Suites, French Suites, Italian Partitas. No doubt he was experimenting with foreign musical fashions, but the music is the music of a social class rather than that of a political territory.

In those days countries did not even have national anthems. Our own royal anthem says nothing of nation or people: it has rooted itself down as a national anthem simply because the monarchy has rooted itself down as a national institution.

*God Save the King*, however, gives us a useful starting point. Nobody knows exactly how or where the tune



originated, but it is not a folk-song. In something like its present form it sprang into wide popularity at the time when Bonnie Prince Charlie was marching into England, and it was a demonstration of loyalty to George II. In the mid-eighteenth century it steps on to the stage of history, and remains unique for several decades.

Then the French Revolution brings forth the first obviously national National Anthem. A revolution in which the top-dogs are deposed always causes more concern abroad than a *coup d'état* in which one top-dog replaces another. The monarchs of Europe were determined to intervene, but a wave of patriotism in France brought even royalists to the colours to repel the foreigner. It was in fact a young royalist officer, Rouget de Lisle, who composed the war-song for the Army of the Rhine that afterwards became *La Marseillaise*. With the change of title, the words seemed to take on a new meaning. The song that had been a local event in Strasbourg seemed to become a national event in Marseilles; and the words, which are merely a patriotic rallying cry against foreign tyranny, seemed to become revolutionary. Tyrants have banned them ever since.

Two things became clear: that the "Children of the Fatherland" are not merely subjects of a king, and that an amateur, in a flash of inspiration, could compose a deathless song. The historical and musical consequences were enormous.

The Americans, remembering their recent successful revolt against British tyranny, were sympathetic to the revolution. Many years later, towards the end of the long Napoleonic war, they were still helping the French. A British fleet bombarded Chesapeake Bay—unsuccessfully—and from that event sprang the words of *The*

*Star-spangled Banner*, supplied to an already popular tune that had been written by one John Smith (of London, Eng.).

The Napoleonic invasions of Austria had already produced Haydn's *Emperor's Hymn*: the time was fast approaching when no nation dared be seen in public without its tune. To me the earlier tunes, composed or adapted in excitement, seem better than the later ones written officially.

The nationalist era had begun. National styles were self-consciously cultivated in countries that had hitherto been unimportant in music. Previously in many parts of Europe the local musicians had written in the Italian or French manner. Italian, French, and Austrian composers had, in fact, created what seemed to be a general European style. Their taste was taste very much as, today, French fashions are fashion.

The Germans were long established in music, and did not need to forge a new national style based on folk-song. Nevertheless their songs took on a new character. It did not matter whether young Napoleon appeared as a liberator, or old Napoleon appeared as a tyrant: patriotism was aroused. It did not matter whether Weber composed overtly national songs, or operas with German words and stories congenial to German hearts: German opera was no longer mere *singspiel*.

Schubert, no politician in music, laid millions under the spell of songs in German. I do not suppose that Schubert ever gave two thoughts to the idea that the many German-speaking kingdoms and principalities might one day become a nation, yet who can deny the power of a beloved song to bring together all those people who sing it in their cradles and ask for it on their deathbeds? Oddly enough, Schubert's own people, the

Austrians, have always been politically apart from the Germans, except during Hitler's forcible *Anschluss*.

Outside Germany, Schubert's songs—at any rate a handful of them—stole into the hearts of a great multitude who regard the lieder of Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, and Richard Strauss as above their heads. But the works of all the great lieder composers have evoked a love and respect that nothing else that is German has been able to do. Listening to this intensely German music and thinking of other intensely German manifestations, I become more than ever convinced that music has little moral influence. Civilized people are just as barbarous as savages, and savages are as artistic as we are. Savage art does not evolve: it has not the history and variety of ours, nor can it display our knowledge; but it arises from the same gifts. Under the skin we are the cannibal's brother in art, and not distant in kinship in other ways.

In passing I must make the point that in a *lied* the composer intends voice and piano to become a perfect partnership. The piano part is not a mere accompaniment. In practice, however, we go to a lieder recital to hear the singer, and we assume that one of the regular top-rank accompanists will do his job to our customary satisfaction. This is not very inartistic on our part. A poem is sung rather than played. An accompanist can mar a performance: he cannot make it.

The nationalistic impulse in music displayed itself in very varied ways. In Russia, Glinka brought the music of the peasants into the opera-house. Not all the aristocratic audience liked this at first. One princely personage is said to have dismissed it all as "coachman's music." But Russian music thereafter *sounded* Russian. It sounded Russian in varying degrees. Later on,

Tchaikovsky was to be regarded as something of a cosmopolitan, less native than Mussorgsky or Borodin or Rimsky Korsakoff. He sounds Russian enough.

Of the Russian composers, Mussorgsky was the one who most vigorously used music as a weapon against the Tsarist tyranny. "Boris" is a tyrant. Ranged against him is not some valiant knight and a few bold companions. It is "The People" (the opera chorus).

Borodin and Rimsky Korsakoff are the great masters of local colour, particularly the semi-oriental colour of the more distant provinces of the old Holy Russia. If Rimsky's *Scheherazade* seems to speak Arabian with something of the same accent as Borodin's *Prince Igor*, we in the west will not complain. All this kind of music demands the big orchestra of which I have already spoken. Stravinsky in his earlier ballet-works—*Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and even *The Rite of Spring*—continued the tradition, though the Rite is supposed to depict a pre-historic world.

Tchaikovsky, though no one could mistake him for anything but a Russian, is not, somehow, so regional. He belongs more to St. Petersburg than to the steppes. His ballets are metropolitan, not Siberian. The characters in his operas belong to that polite society that was as likely to talk French as Russian. His symphonies look inwards to his own Russian heart rather than outwards to the Russian scene.

From him descends Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff lived his later life as an exile from Soviet Russia. One senses that if the Revolution had come earlier, Tchaikovsky would have done the same. Indeed, the Soviets must have sensed this themselves, for in their earlier days they denounced Tchaikovsky as a bourgeois. However, they could not dispel his magic, and now

revere him as a true son of Russia. How fortunate for them that the meaning of music is so indefinite !

The Soviet composers are as nationalist as their predecessors and less original. They do, however, avoid the remoteness and incomprehensibility of some of the kinds of modern music to which we try hard to accustom ourselves this side of the Iron Curtain.

The Russian composers felt free to use the folk-tunes of all the Tsarist empire. Chopin, a Pole, wrote Polish music, and hated his Russian masters from first to last.

It is possible to be surprised that the son of a Frenchman should feel so strongly Polish, and to be amused at the suggestion of one friend that his name should be changed to Chopinski. But the father had fallen in love with Poland and had fought in its uprisings. No born Pole could have been more ardent. Son of such a father and of a Polish mother, intimate of the young aristocrats who went to the father's boarding-school, young Frederic grew up beloved and admired. Everyone knew that he would be the voice of Poland, and he never failed them. Going abroad, he took with him a goblet full of Polish earth. It was buried with him in France.

No nationalist composer has more universalized the music of his native country than Chopin. By comparison, the composers of some other countries seem positively parochial. He was very un-explicit in his titles. You do not have to be a Pole to compose waltzes, studies, sonatas, and scherzos. It is true that Polonaises and Mazurkas are Polish, and we may vaguely discern heroic tales in the Ballades, but I cannot tell you the story. Chopin himself was convinced that in his music there is his heart and that his heart is a Polish heart.

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Romantics will be glad to know that he regarded happiness as preventing creative work : even his brilliant and gay pieces were, he felt, rooted in his misery. Writing to Delphine Potocka to tell her that he had been faithful to her in his fashion even when in George Sand's embraces, he said, ". . . you will be best convinced by my works. When we were together, I only polished up work in my old albums . . . or if I wrote new works it was only when you were away for a long time. . . . Now, these last years, see how many works, and not insignificant ones, I have thrown off—it's clear that not love but art has taken my energy. . . . Findelka, I've never loved anyone as I love you. . . . In Sand's embraces, I have always thought that I would rather have you. . . . You were my first mistress, so be my last—after you I won't take any other. I think I have convinced you, and that you will let me come to you tonight. . . ."

Though this book is not primarily biographical, I have included this condensed extract from Wierzynski's *The Life and Death of Chopin* because, like other romantic composers—particularly Liszt and Wagner—Chopin seemed to be able to live according to laws that would never be granted to you and me. Reading a few of his sentences, we may feel disinclined to admire. Reading a biography, we are touched and sympathetic. Apart from his lovers, many people loved and admired Chopin. In the end we join with them in weeping at his death-bed.

We are perhaps less sympathetic towards Liszt. The Hungarians do not admire him as unreservedly as the Poles admire Chopin. We all feel that the music, like the musician, is too full of humbug. But there is genius too; and, reading Liszt's life, we feel unable to apply

everyday moral judgments to a man who could live with this countess and that princess and yet end his life as an *abbé*. If only he had gone further in holy orders, what a father-confessor he would have made! Such understanding. . . .

Chopin's and Liszt's nationalism does not seem to challenge the general security of Europe. Nowadays, when we live in daily fear of yet another outbreak of other people's patriotism, we cannot help reflecting that if the Great Powers had conceded a truly generous measure of home rule to their subject peoples in good time, much subsequent violence might have been avoided. On the whole, they suppressed their subjects or granted them deceptive paper constitutions. Vienna and Moscow, Paris and London encored the nationalist music and went on maintaining "law and order" throughout their empires. The empires now look a little the worse for it. A hundred years after Chopin's death one looks in vain for a Romanoff, a Hapsburg, a Bourbon, or a Hohenzollern on a great throne.

Not that tyranny has disappeared.

Italy suffered much from tyranny. Northern Italy was ruled over by Austria. Middle Italy included the Papal States. Southern Italy was the despicable Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The secret police flourished everywhere. If ever a nationalist movement seemed based on good sense, it was the *Risorgimento* in Italy. Most of the way round Italy the sea makes a natural frontier. It is true the mountain frontiers are tricky, Trieste is a headache, and Garibaldi would no doubt have liked to include Nice, his birthplace, in Italian territory; but Italy is one of the most recognizable countries, and her cause was a popular one.

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Verdi was her voice. The very letters of his name stood for *Vittorio Emmanuele Re D'Italia*—a slogan in favour of the young Prince Victor Emmanuel of Savoy who was to be the future king. The reader must go to a biography (say Francis Toye's) for a full account of Verdi's activities on the political field. We who are familiar with a totalitarian attitude towards art cannot help observing that Austrian censorship never suppressed Verdi's operas. It might insist on amendments, but it did not ban. Mildly, as it seems to us, it asked that a wicked king should be presented as a duke; that action unacceptable in Europe should pretend to take place in America. We may also observe that when the Italians were free they soon set out to acquire an empire—to Verdi's dismay. And we may add that all Verdi's music did not save the Italians from Mussolini-ism.

However, our gloomy hindsight belongs to us, not to Verdi. Though Italian music did not need to be brought to the fore—it had been in the fore for centuries—it needed invigorating . . . something stronger than the music of Donizetti and Bellini. In opera after opera Verdi chose to set to music such historical episodes as depict the champions of liberty—against despots, against the Inquisition. In *Aïda*, composed to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal, we witness the tyranny of a Pharaoh over the Ethiopians.

Verdi made a large fortune out of opera. Perhaps it is not always a good thing to live to see your dreams come true. In his old age Verdi produced *Otello* and *Falstaff*. They are Italian masterpieces despite their English association. They are not nationalist.

I must not suggest that before these two works Verdi wrote only nationalist works. *La Traviata*, for example, is unpolitical. But the nationalism is obvious enough



often enough. Now we largely disregard it. We accept the stories as historical and picturesque, and care primarily for the music. But this is not to say that composers should not bother their heads about public affairs. One might as well argue that King David could have written beautiful poetry without feeling fierce about the Philistines.

It is difficult to estimate just how political a composer's nationalism is. In Verdi's case we do not have to doubt. He helped the warriors with money as well as music, and when Italy became a kingdom, was one of its first senators. With some other composers we feel that, being steeped in a certain tradition of folk-lore, they wrote as they did without necessarily having clear political affiliations. It would be difficult, for instance, to look upon Grieg as fiercely political. His is a pleasant, quiet nationalism, but, then, Norway and Sweden were able to part company without mass murder. Grieg's music, the pride of Norway, is very local. Perhaps I was thinking of him when I said that compared to Chopin some composers seemed parochial. He has the charm one expects from a regional poet. Here are the Norwegian scene and the creatures of legend. When his music is linked with the drama of Ibsen we feel that the *Peer Gynt* music is perhaps too pretty for *Peer Gynt*. Nevertheless, for every one who knows *Peer Gynt*, there are a hundred who know and love the *Peer Gynt Suite*.

With some composers nationalism was a principle to be followed even in other people's countries. When Dvořák was principal of the National Conservatory in New York he turned his Czech mind to the question: What is American music? Is it the music of the

European immigrants, of the Negro, of the Red Indian? We, listening to his New World symphony, may well ask how far this piece is American, how far it is Czech. Certainly the lovely melody that opens the slow movement has the flavour of a negro spiritual, but I cannot altogether rebut the belief, favoured in some quarters, that it comes from Dvořák's native Bohemia.

Folk-song is both local and universal. Usually we reckon not to confuse a Highland melody with a Spanish one, or morris dances with czardás. Yet the oddest correspondences do occur. Switching on the radio in the middle of a broadcast, I once thought I was listening to a Hebridean song, but it turned out to be Chinese. Again, the Israeli anthem *Hatikvah* bears a close resemblance to one of Smetana's most celebrated melodies. In this instance perhaps we need not be so surprised. There have been so many Jews for so many generations in the middle European countries. Jews and Gentiles owe more to one another than either side usually cares to admit.

I am told that in Czechoslovakia, Smetana is closer to the heart of the people than Dvořák. Outside that country we generally rate Dvořák the higher. Admired and helped by Brahms, Dvořák has something of the great German's character, though not quite his stature.

For an oppressed people, the Czechs seem to have produced a high proportion of genial music. They seem to be jollier than the Poles. I cannot say whether this was because Dvořák was a healthier, more optimistic man than Chopin or because Austrian rule was more amiable than Russian. We are apt to judge these things very superficially. If Dvořák had been a frail consumptive and Chopin had made puffer-trains his hobby, we musicians might now be talking a different kind of quasi-learned nonsense about history.

Among the later arrivals on the musical scene we must count the Spaniards. Two of them must be equated. There are a number of pieces that, so it seems to me, could have been written by either Granados or Albeniz. Whether writing simply or with a proliferation of decorative notes, they bring us that mixture of stylish formality and sexy moodiness that belongs to Spanish dancing—arrogant and yielding by turns.

De Falla's music is less elaborate: the flavour is less sweet. He wrote some of his most intensely Spanish music for Diaghileff's Russian Ballet. If this seems surprising, we must remember that in the years that preceded World War I Europe enjoyed a period of tranquillity in which currencies were stable and passports seldom necessary. It is true that Russia was never far off revolution, that Ireland seethed, and that the Kaiser was building a very large navy for a very small empire, but the frontiers of art were silken curtains.

Before we go on to the special case of Wagner, we cannot help noticing that Mendelssohn's music seems to be quite without nationalist flavourings. Of course it is German, yet it has a Mediterranean quality too. It is Protestant in a Victorian-British way (much of it was written for Victorian Britain). I cannot find the slightest hint in it of his Jewish ancestry.

He was the prodigy-child of well-to-do converts living under conditions that favoured the view that the baser kinds of racialism were retreating before a general enlightenment. He wrote *Elijah* for the great amateur choral-societies and *Songs Without Words* for the individual amateur pianist. He founded the Leipzig Conservatorium for the fledgling professional. Perhaps he was too much the good boy of music, but one could wish that a life-work like his were still possible.

## CHAPTER X

### WAGNER'S NATIONALISM. NEW OPERATIC TECHNIQUES

It would be easy to regard Wagner as a teller of tales—tales of knights and gnomes, giants and dwarfs, dragons and caps of invisibility. If history since his day had been a gentle narrative we should by now have forgotten or disregarded what he himself wrote about his own work. But because we have read Goebbels, we find Wagner's polemics disquieting. Because we have witnessed a twilight of discredited gods and the destruction of a concrete-and-steel Valhalla, we feel we must look deep into the music-dramas.

If we find a now-unpalatable symbolism in his works, it is because he invites us to see it there. His giants are those "good simple Germans" exploited by capitalistic Nibelungs who are ready to forswear everything that is beautiful for the sake of gold. The Nibelungs are the Jews of Wagner's anti-Semitic imagination. (Wagner was ready enough to employ Jewish singers and conductors whenever their skill was just what he wanted.) The gods are the law-givers who cannot be relied upon to uphold their own pledges. And the hero? He is the intuitive young warrior who has to enquire what fear is, forging his own weapons and guided by the voices of his ancestral forests.

Remembering Hitlerism, we hate this kind of symbolism. But we hate it in cold print. Inside the opera-house we fall under the spell of Wagner's magic and forget that he was one of the spiritual founders of the Germany that invaded Belgium in 1914 and Poland in 1939.

No composer has had a more far-reaching influence. He revolutionized opera. Writing his own libretti (Germans tell me that he was a really distinguished poet), he married the two main elements of opera more firmly than ever before, and produced what he called music-drama. In some ways he made opera less intelligible, in some ways more.

Until then the general principle had held good that intelligibility was one thing and emotional expression another. In moments of explanation the composer would use recitative—or even, in some cases, plain speech. In emotional crises the burden would fall on the music. This way of doing things is both absurd and practical. It served for a long time.

Wagner's music attempts to be all of a piece without set-pieces. It avoids the incongruities of the other method and maintains a lofty diction all the while.

Very severe demands are made on the singers, the orchestra . . . and the audience. In Germany in the great days a multitude of opera-houses trained an army of singers from whom could be chosen the heroic few worthy to triumph in a Wagner festival. Now, neither dollars nor pounds seem to be able to assemble a completely satisfactory cast.

Wagner's orchestration is heavier than any used by earlier operatic composers. Recognizing what this involved for the singers, he put the orchestra under the stage when he came to build his own theatre in Bayreuth. In other theatres the singers have to sing across a gigantic orchestral pit. Many a voice falls into that pit, crawling out when some great wave of orchestral sound has receded. Perhaps one ought to blame conductors for being less merciful than ordinary accompanists are expected to be; but Wagner put so much of the drama

into the orchestra that we would sometimes rather pay attention to what happens there than to what is going on on the stage. Furthermore, there are times when the vocal line seems merely to tag along with some strand of orchestral counterpoint. The result is that, despite Wagner's theories, we tend to pick out certain sections as being virtually arias—the *Liebestod*, for example—and to regard certain narrations as long-winded substitutes for the old recitatives. Even Wagner himself had to concede the possibility of making concert excerpts, though he hated doing it. Nowadays many people sit through the tedious half-hours for the sake of the mighty and magical scenes that have already become familiar as music in the concert-hall. I am that sort of semi-Wagnerite myself, and am inclined to agree with the verdict that Wagner was the world's greatest composer of slow music.

Yet, though Wagner's tempo is seldom swift and his rhythms lack the dancing spirit, he has in his great moments a splendour that has never been surpassed. Unlike other musical magicians, Wagner never descends to writing mere effects. Take the love-potion out of the goblet: you still have a vintage wine.

If I were asked for the quintessence of the Wagnerian style, I should give the quite obvious answer—the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*. Here we have the highly chromatic harmony, the melting discords, the avoidance of final cadences. It is poetry without full stops, an incantation to love that contains everything of fret and fever and ecstasy. Yet it does not pull the wool over the musician's eyes. Examine the score cold-bloodedly, analyse it pedantically. There are few mystical incantations that proceed with this kind of internal logic.

Only once did Wagner write an un-tragic work. This



was *The Mastersingers of Nuremburg*—a sunny story of the victory of poetry over pedantry. Elsewhere his heroes are doomed.

Many of the romantic composers lived astounding lives. Wagner's is the most incredible, and indeed would be literally incredible were it not for the mass of evidence that plumps out Ernest Newman's magnificent four volumes. Wagner knew what he wanted and went straight to get it. The curious thing is that each action, considered separately, can be justified. Did he run away with his best friend's wife? Well, it takes two to do that, and perhaps she ran away with him. Did he anger the Bavarians by spending too much of the royal treasury on opera? Well, it was Ludwig II who sought him out, not he Ludwig. Did he borrow recklessly? Well, we have value for money in a series of towering masterpieces and a festival-theatre to play them in. He was himself a master of justification, but his cunning autobiography proved to be an insufficient smoke-screen.

I believe it is true to say that more books have been written about Wagner than about all the other masters put together.

Wagner's "Music of the Future" is now music of the past. The opera composers of today are pondering afresh the problems of how to combine music and words, orchestration and acting. The problem of intelligibility is still with us—not only verbal but psychological intelligibility. One of Wagner's inventions is now discarded, but it was a remarkable one and served him magnificently, particularly in making a oneness out of the four operas of *The Ring of the Nibelungs*. This was the *leitmotiv*—a phrase memorable and full of character that became a recurring symbol of some person or situation. In A. E. F. Dickinson's "The Musical Design of 'The

Ring ' ' ' I find no fewer than seventy such motives, some labelled with a person's name, some recalling an occasion (e.g., The Curse), some attached to an emotion (Serene Love). Debussy ridiculed the method, and said that whenever you met a Wagnerian character he presented his visiting-card; but this sort of criticism tells us more about the critic than about the criticized.

Wagner's greatest successor was Richard Strauss. I do not mean that Strauss was a mere imitator—he is a great composer in his own right; but he descends from Wagner much as Brahms descends from Beethoven. There is something of Liszt too—a bravura swagger that tries to make us overlook a little shoddiness here and there. There is wit, there is humour, a Viennese grace at times, and always a glittering orchestration. He composed with a kind of daring, but his harmonic innovations have not pointed a way for the young composers of today. He wrote many variations on the theme of love from romantic love in *Rosenkavalier* to utter depravity in *Salome*.

## CHAPTER XI

### SONG AND DANCE

IN dealing with the material of music I said comparatively little about rhythm. But I did make the point that primitive peoples regarded rhythm as magic, and I quoted the suggestion (put forward originally, I believe, by Curt Sachs) that singing arose from an attempt to make the voice dance.

Dancing and singing are so closely associated that we feel a strangeness in any complete divorce between them. There is, of course, a divorce between dancing and religion in most of Europe. We do not expect a priest to dance before the altar, and there are forms of Christian music that successfully conceal or abandon the ancient traditions of magic gesture and movement. Even so, when we turn to the great masterpieces of religious music as written by Bach and Handel, Haydn and Mozart, Brahms and Verdi, Elgar and Vaughan Williams, we feel that the rhythms of the dance are not far off and the voice is lifted on high. We accept Verdi's somewhat operatic Requiem; we go to Sadlers Wells to see Vaughan Williams's *Job* danced and mimed.

Dancing in church is rare (even in America), but many of the great church composers, from Byrd onwards, were great composers of dance music.

The vague but important something that we call inspiration attaches itself most readily to singing and dancing: it easily deserts us when we try to write a highly organized music that is emancipated from simple rhythms and melodies. That is why we offer particular

reverence to those composers who could organize and cultivate a vast piece of music without losing inspiration. A large movement that seems to be one idea rather than a series of connected ideas is a rare achievement. We can perhaps see why if we try to imagine a ballet that would consist of one dance rather than a series of dances.

It is much simpler to compose some short piece in the heat of inspiration. For this reason we sometimes get a successful song from a composer who would be quite incapable of making his music grow and develop. I have already mentioned the astonishing case of Rouget de Lisle's *Marseillaise*. In the history of music we nearly always find that where an almost forgotten composer is remembered by one piece, the piece in question is a song or a dance. Think of Boccherini's *Minuet* and Spohr's *Rose Softly Blooming*. In a chapter on popular music I shall argue that certain composers who never wrote more than sixteen bars at a stretch were men of genius, even if their genius was of the kind that does not call for reverence.

In the music of the classical period we hear over and over again the dance without steps: in the romantic period the song without words. In the symphonies that include a minuet movement the dance-ancestry is declared; in those that have a scherzo it is barely concealed.

To my mind Beethoven is the composer who most firmly disciplined the song-and-dance impulse and made it serve his purposes. When he yielded to the impulse he could write a song-without-words, as in the first movement of the *Moonlight Sonata*, and he often wrote minuets. But we cannot help noticing that he wrote few separate songs and dances and he composed only one opera. When Wagner declared that the *Seventh Symphony* was

"the apotheosis of the dance" he was right. "Apotheosis" is defined in my dictionary as "ascension to glory, release from earthly life." When Beethoven disciplined the song and dance impulse he did not suppress it: he transformed it.

Most other composers in the larger forms betray their difficulties in applying discipline. Schubert sang and danced his way through the sonatas and symphonies and chamber works. Schumann strikes us as being happiest when he was composing a series of miniatures, each with its own fantastic title, brought together under some general heading like *Carnaval* or *Forest Scenes*. Such piano collections take their place alongside the song-cycles *Poet's Love* or *Woman's Love*. His piano concerto is a success, but his symphonies are seldom played, and this is not only due to some lack of mastery in orchestration.

Brahms is the case that most invites thinking over. No one had a finer technique of composition than he. The proof of this lies in the remarkable fertility of invention in his sets of variations on other people's themes. He does not need to fumble or helplessly repeat himself. He writes a symphony or a concerto with a majestic command of all the processes involved. Yet there are times when we wonder whether the inmost spirit of Brahms is not best found in the lieder and even in the waltzes. (Believe it or not, Brahms had an enormous admiration for Johann Strauss—the *Blue Danube* Strauss.)

Nowadays our moderns give us little that we can sing or dance to. Benjamin Britten is a more singing composer than most. Perhaps it is for that reason that he is one of the best-liked of the younger men.

## CHAPTER XII

### POPULAR MUSIC

**I**F the composer of a musical show writes a piece about yearning broken-heartedly for a departed cutie, that's light music. If we hear a divertimento by Mozart, that's serious. The adjectives are silly, but we have come to understand them.

In the eighteenth century a grand duke's composer was expected to write for all occasions—symphonies and operas when they were needed, and divertimentos and dance-music when *they* were. In a sense, then, those composers wrote light and serious music, but they were to some degree removed from “the people.” Though many of the dances were of popular origin, they were transformed once they arrived in royal ballrooms, and the *capellmeister's* music seldom reminds us of the peasants or the townsfolk. If we insist on calling this music light, we must agree with the man-in-the-street that it is not, in his sense, popular.

Popular music in those days consisted of folk-tunes, topical ballads, and so forth. Our own heritage of popular song includes two main types: the genuine folk-songs of great antiquity composed by *anon*, and the topical songs about public events that we now regard as traditional, even though we know the poet and composer. (Sometimes, as in *God Save the King*, we know only one of them, since new words were given to an old tune.) The songs are a running commentary on our history. The *Vicar of Bray* is a summary of changing monarchies and religious disputation; many of the Scottish songs tell the story of Bonnie Prince Charlie;



the songs of Charles Dibdin (*Tom Bowling*, for example) help to explain why the Navy became popular despite the press-gang and frightful conditions below deck.

As England became more and more industrialized the topical songs were less of the sea and country and more of the town. They continue to be vivid revelations of the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

When popular music became big business it did undoubtedly lose much of its quality. Though topical titles were still in vogue, they were often totally unconnected with the music. A Victorian writer of successful quadrilles might call one set *Balaclava* and another *The Relief of Lucknow*, but we now collect the coloured lithographs on the front covers and throw away the music. The songs of the music-halls were better than these semi-genteel dances, but the ones we remember now are mostly late-Victorian or Edwardian.

It is the lower forms of drawing-room music that seem among the worst manifestations of the Victorian era—the scampering or simpering dance-music, the sickly sentimental “ballads.” The very word ballad seems insulted by this association when one remembers the heroic balladry of the medieval minstrels.

The nineteenth century was not all like this. We owe to it some delightful examples of fortune-making light-music.

I have already mentioned Brahms’s admiration for Strauss. This was Johann Strauss the younger—eldest son of an earlier waltz-king of the same name. The father had learned his business from Lanner in a world that already knew the waltzes of Schubert (Beethoven also wrote a few waltzes of no importance.)

I have no space in which to attempt to trace the deriva-

tion of the waltz or to argue how much it owes to the traditional Ländler. The point for us is that the waltz became the king of dances for the best part of a hundred years, and that the Strauss family were among the world's greatest purveyors of pleasure and gaiety.

Father Johann was not a good father, and gave his sons ample reason to think of him unfavourably. Three sons became famous in the world of ballroom music—Johann, Joseph, and Eduard. The eldest of them was the most famous. Stories and legends cling round all of them. The father was enormously successful and famous. Exhausting but highly profitable tours took him all over Europe. He played at seventy-two concerts in London at the time of Queen Victoria's coronation. He was the darling of European monarchs.

Johann II travelled even more widely. There is a story that during a triumphal tour of New York and Boston he had so many requests for a lock of his hair that his dog returned to Europe quite bald. In later life he turned from dance-music pure and simple to operetta (*Fledermaus* still holds the stage), and these are among the forerunners of countless operettas, musical comedies, and, though at some remove, technicolor musicals.

His brothers are now seldom remembered, though they were men of gifts. Joseph was the one who met tragedy. In 1870 in Warsaw some Russian officers insisted he must play for them in the middle of the night. He refused; they used violence; he was scarce able to travel back to Vienna, where he died.

Dance-music was no longer part of a serious composer's job, but the waltz lured most of them. Wagner, of course, did not compose waltzes, but think who did :

Chopin and Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and all the specialist ballet-composers from Delibes downwards.

The waltz appeared later on in the work of Johann's namesake Richard Strauss. Meanwhile it had had its Parisian triumphs in the operettas of Offenbach.

The waltz is often held up as being more well-bred than our modern dance-music. It is only fair to point out that time has winnowed out some of the really appalling waltzes that poured from the presses in great-grandfather's day. Look through a great many bad waltzes, and you might wonder whether the music of Hollywood is not to be preferred. We must not compare the best of one kind with the worst of another.

Our modern dance-music has a strange ancestry and a dark history.

When Europeans first went to America, whether to seek El Dorado, baptize the heathen, escape justice, or till the soil, they found the redskin evasive. You could not easily set him to work, and if you tried to do so he was liable to die on your hands. And so, early in the history of Christian America, there grew up the shameful slave trade. Some men became rich by kidnapping Africans and taking them across to the American slave-marts in floating concentration camps. Some became rich by employing the Negroes on cotton and tobacco plantations. Some became rich in Bristol and Liverpool by handling the produce. The trade went on, with little enough opposition, for three centuries.

In America—I refer particularly to what the U.S.A. now regards as The South—the Negroes underwent a great transformation. They learned English, they learned Christianity, they learned white music—particularly hymns. From the white man's hymns there

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In America—I refer particularly to what the U.S.A. now regards as The South—the Negroes underwent a great transformation. They learned English, they learned Christianity, they learned white music—particularly hymns. From the white man's hymns there

derived the coloured man's spirituals. From the coloured man's spirituals there derived the white man's "plantation ditties," particularly the pleasant songs of Stephen Foster.

Another line of evolution: some of the American States had been French and Spanish colonies. The un-English activity called Carnival flourished there—the street processions, the band-waggon, the promiscuous dancing. The town-negro learned to play band instruments without "learning music." The birth of jazz is obscure. Nobody knows for certain how the very word jazz came into existence, but its most enthusiastic students and admirers apply the word only to the old-style negro dance-music that was improvised on the spot and never written down, or to its most authentic modern counterparts. They violently condemn the easy-going habit of calling all loud commercial dance-music jazz.

Nevertheless modern commercial dance-music owes something to real jazz. It also owes something to Sousa's bands, American vaudeville, English music-hall, and Jewish show-business.

People now middle-aged can remember its development from *Alexander's Ragtime Band* onwards; and Irving Berlin, the composer of that tune, has written best-sellers from then till now.

Irving Berlin has not merely written dance-tunes. Many of his dance-tunes have been "hit-numbers" of popular shows. The evolution of musical comedy demands a history in itself. Would you start with such phenomena as Irving Berlin or George Gershwin and go back to their ghetto ancestry? Would you rather trace show business through an English line of descent, writing first of Gilbert and Sullivan and then of the



Edwardian successes produced by George Edwardes? Would you keep the story mainly American and lay emphasis on the Show Boats plying up and down the Mississippi? Such a history could be a vast and fascinating work.

One could be very searching about social and economic forces. Our modern popular music is often condemned as being unduly escapist—mere opium for the masses. The charge is not unfounded. The songs of Gilbert and Sullivan often seem boldly political by comparison. Nevertheless, the historian in the future (if modern weapons of war permit us a future) will be able to discover something of our lives, our hopes and fears, from our commercially plugged songs, even if he gets a somewhat unfavourable view of us as a lot of sentimentalists either maudlin or hysterical.

What particularly strikes me is the almost complete absence of war-songs of any character or quality in the Second World War. The First World War had its never-to-be-forgotten songs. The Depression had *Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime?*

A great gulf yawns between "serious" music and commercial music. Attempts have been made to bridge the gap. From the commercial side the best jump was made by Gershwin with his *Rhapsody in Blue*. It is a work full of obvious faults, but it has that genius-quality that enables a man to do something unaccountable and inimitable. If I may be permitted my own definition of genius as being an ability to do something that you were not taught and that you cannot teach, I may also perhaps be allowed to apply the word "genius" to the comparatively untutored composers who, though they had to employ secretaries and orchestrators, gave us music we

remember. Better this sort of genius than the talent that composes forgettable symphonies.

Mention of orchestrators reminds me of a quality of popular music that is not to be found in serious music. Much popular music seems to have no standard orchestration. Ordinary sheet-music (such as you buy from Woolworth's if you want the latest hit) consists of the simplest and barest presentation of tune and chords. No public performer plays like that. The soloist dresses it up according to fancy: the dance-bands play from arrangements and special orchestrations. If the tune comes from a show, it has, no doubt, its original orchestration, probably supplied by a specialist, but this may remain a hand-written job used only in the theatre.

All this is a comparatively new phenomenon. The light music of Strauss, Sullivan, and Offenbach may appear in various guises today, but it was orchestrated by its composers—the original versions are available and often performed.

In this connection I must try to make clear the meanings of the words "arrangement" and "transcription." If you play a piano-duet version of a symphony, you will find that nearly all the notes of the symphony have been carefully transcribed on to the four staves and arranged under the four hands. If you play a Liszt version of a Schubert song, you will find that hundreds of Lisztian notes have been arranged decoratively around the simple Schubertian tune. The careful transcription is always called an "arrangement." The fanciful arrangement is always called a "transcription." This topsy-turvy system applies to serious music. The light orchestrators are more sensible: they call a re-arrangement an arrangement.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEBATABLE COMPOSERS

ALTHOUGH I occasionally turn from music-making to writing about music, I have all the musician's distaste for the life of a critic. I can think of few existences more penitential than going to concerts and operas for a living, tasting the produce in advance for prospective customers. Still, though there is an eternal (and perhaps healthy) hostility between artist and critic, I can sometimes put myself in the critic's place and share his outlook.

Looking at performers, the critic must often groan with irritation and boredom. Here we go again, playing our *Appassionata*, conducting our Pastoral, singing our "Where'er you walk." Here we are, putting our faces and press-notices on posters, smirking at our public, miming the solemn, traditional clowning that is called platform deportment, and switching on appropriate passions and sentiments. You have only to read a typical book of memoirs written by some ageing singer to wonder by what heavenly dispensation people as crudely selfish and exhibitionist as we are should enjoy so much love and esteem.

The poor critic, whatever his reverence for Beethoven, gets sick of the old titan. He feels that Bach has prayed over him once too often and Wagner bulldozed him twice too much. And so he takes under his wing some composer, alive or dead, of whose music he has heard too little, and badgers us to widen our repertoire.

Why do we resist? It is partly your fault. When I was only a child I discovered that my friends had

picked on certain of my pieces as their favourites. These were my party-pieces. I was always asked for them. I might offer to play my new piece: my relatives and friends wanted the old ones. It has always been thus. I find myself well paid for pieces that I have known for thirty years—pieces needing little enough fresh practising and no re-memorizing. I find little profit in, and a spate of critical squabbling over, any new music I may care to put into a programme, and it attracts a small audience.

Putting the moderns on one side for a later chapter, let us consider what of the older music is still unfairly neglected.

Most of the older music has been arranged in some sort of merit by common consent. Though I hate awarding certificates to great composers as though they were candidates in a festival, I think I may count on wide agreement in putting Bach and Handel, Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, Brahms and Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Chopin in the front rank. You may, if you like, arrange the front rank in some order of your own, but those composers are less challengeable than Schumann and Mendelssohn. Perhaps Schumann and Mendelssohn rank in your opinion above Dvořák and Weber; perhaps not; but you would put them, wouldn't you?, above Borodin or Bizet.

The exact placing of these composers is not important: indeed, I find something distasteful in it. The point is that the amount of disagreement between one estimate and another is not very great. What you would not do is to put Borodin in the front rank or Bach in the second.

There are, however, certain composers who do not settle down in any agreed position. Berlioz is a noteworthy example.

Let us consider how far general agreement goes. He was the great pioneer of modern orchestration. It is said

that there was hardly an instrument in the orchestra that he could play even half decently, yet he knew with uncanny certainty what could be done with the greatest effectiveness. One story is that he used to sit in the orchestral pit, turning over pages for this person and that, until the spirit and technique of each instrument had entered into him. Whether in his works or in his *Treatise on Instrumentation* (though it is now out of date) he revealed himself as a great colourist.

He was the arch-romantic. Here again I must refer to the biographies, and particularly to the fragments of autobiography, for a very strange life, one that you would reject as unbelievable if you met it in a novel. Typical is the story of the lonely old man, twice widowed, who recalled how, in childhood, he longed for a little girl he once met at a party. Off he went to find her—and to propose marriage to a much-surprised grandmother. He was refused, but he had someone to write letters to.

He is, I think, the closest musical counterpart to Byron. There is something fabulous about him. His favourite worlds were antique Greece and Troy and Carthage. He was attracted by those who dared greatly—Faust, Romeo. . . . He loved to handle gigantic resources.

I have to remind myself that he was a Frenchman. He seems apart from other French composers, with their love of precision and economy, and in his life he knew more success outside France than at home.

For most people he is the composer of *Symphonie Fantastique*, of the *Rakoczy March*, of the *Royal Hunt*. The larger works are given seldom—few people know the two operas on the story of Troy—and they still fail to become part of the settled repertoire. Some very great conductors have devoted themselves fanatically to the cause of Berlioz, some very discerning critics have cried

him up, but he remains unacceptable to the generality. In the ears of most listeners his melodies have a disconcerting shape or an unexpected length. Some call this originality and accuse audiences of being dense: others argue that Berlioz had a kind of amateurishness. We may learn something of his habits of mind in his *Treatise on Instrumentation*. After describing an ideal orchestra and chorus that would amount to 467 instrumentalists and 360 chorus-singers he says: "Its repose would be majestic as the slumber of ocean; its agitations would recall the tempest of the tropics; its explosions, the outbursts of volcanoes; therein would be heard the plaints, the murmurs, the mysterious sounds of primeval forests; the clamours, the prayers, the songs of triumph or of mourning of a people with expansive soul, ardent heart, and fiery passions; its silence would inspire awe by its solemnity; and organizations the most rebellious would shudder to behold its crescendo spread roaringly—like a stupendous conflagration."

I quote from a translation that may not do justice to Berlioz's French. Even making allowances for it, we are amazed to read this sort of language from a musician. The musician of today looks upon that kind of talk about music as positively betraying an unmusical mind. He expects it from minor women poets who flourish in parish magazines. But the fact is, the musician of today often fails to realize how much of this sort of writing flourished amongst the nineteenth-century composers. Some of Beethoven's letters, for instance, if quoted without acknowledgment in programme notes, would be rejected by the audience as mere literary day-dreaming on the part of the programme compiler.

We are brought up against the problem of whether we ever hear music the way its composers intended it to be



heard. It may be that some music accommodates itself to the spirit of a new age: some does not. Some remains familiar in the way that Shakespeare remains familiar: some seems as strange as though it breathed itself into existence in some Aztec temple. Perhaps this is a somewhat forced comparison, for Berlioz's music is not exotic and incomprehensible, but I use it to try to convey the sense of a something that baffles one.

We are less baffled by Mahler. He too was an arch-romantic, master of orchestration. Here, I think, the problem is different from the one set by Berlioz, for the Austrians and Germans are happier with their Mahler than the French are with their Berlioz. Mahler, by the way, is popular amongst people whose grandparents derided him because he was a Jew and who would themselves deride him for the same reason if he were alive today.

He has staunch adherents in this country and his popularity is growing. He dismays some of us by the sheer size and length of the works. As they unwind themselves through one long movement after another, some of us feel that the truly grand is mixed with the merely grandiose; that childlike innocence gets perilously near childishness in places; that rosy-fingered dawn and sunset glory appear too often. It may well be that our palates are defective. There are dishes that are eaten with gusto in one country that repel visitors from another. Think of snails in France. The occasional visitor who does like snails—as I do—comes home and says, "You must try them: they're delicious." He makes few converts.

People of different national tastes stare at one another with amazed incomprehension. The French cannot understand our reverence for Elgar. I can think of no

better simile than the much-used one of fine wines that do not travel. Move a bottle of champagne five thousand miles and, if it has been moved with care, it is still champagne. Move a bottle of some other fine wine (I do not specify, since I am no authority on wines), and you will find something undistinguished and unpalatable in your wineglass.

When we in England are offered the wines of other countries we refill our glasses with Sibelius and wrinkle our noses at Bruckner.

Music is not the only art in which this sort of thing happens. European critics of poetry have generally placed Byron and Oscar Wilde higher than our own critics would put them. Looking abroad, we are more willing to accept the Russian estimate of Pushkin than the German estimate of Goethe, though we all write respectfully of Goethe in our examination papers.

One cannot help speculating about changes in status as the generations go by. Middle-aged people can easily remember when the musical world was being urged to take more notice of Scriabin. In those days he was praised too much: now too little. I remember when Sibelius was little known and was thought of primarily as the composer of *Valse Triste*. Then he was praised too little. Is he now revered too much? Purcell, despite many efforts to popularize him, remains a Third Programme worthy. Tchaikovsky, an easy target for criticism, continues to warm the cockles of the heart. It is hard for those of us who feel confident in our judgments to realize that we may live long enough to hear young cock-sparrows saying, "Of course, the old boy's quite sound in his way but he's still teaching his pupils to play . . ." What?

CHAPTER XIV  
INTERPRETATION

WHEN I was a little boy I learned from an old boy who thought Debussy was too modern. He was a distinguished musician, but when he tried to play Debussy—and he did try—no sense seemed to come out of his efforts, though, goodness knows, he could play the notes, count the time, and obey the marks of expression. His failure was one of my most important lessons in interpretation. It taught me that beyond the music that one knows how to play because, somehow, one just knows, there are kinds of music that one must unveil and discover.

Musical notation is very imprecise. It is safest in indicating pitch. Tune your instrument properly and read the music accurately, and pitch will come if you are a skilled player and have a true ear.

Rhythm is another matter. There is a much greater element of choice. You have a choice between strict rhythm and *rubato* (flexible) rhythm. But this is not all. We measure music in beats, and unfortunately we use the word beat to mean either a moment of accentuation or the lapse of time between one regular accent and another. Having settled on beat-lengths, we divide into halves and quarters. In some pieces a three-quarter fraction followed by a quarter must be played as written. In some others it must be interpreted as two-thirds and a third. A dot after a note is supposed to prolong it by half its normal length. I have been irritated by failure to observe this. I have been driven mad by an over-conscientious determination to adhere to it.

We are told that a dot over a note means *staccato*. Child pianists are taught by insensitive teachers that it means pick your hand up quickly. So it may—sometimes. But it can also mean pick your hand up reluctantly. It ought to mean that the sound stops, yet artistry and imagination sometimes bid us take the hand off while leaving the pedal down.

A slur can indicate the number of notes to be included in one stroke of a violin bow or in one breath in a wind melody. On the piano it may indicate the length of a phrase, or only that part of a phrase that is to be played legato. Some slurs seem to have been strewn across the music with careless abandon and are observed at your peril.

Peddalling marks in some editions seem designed to confuse even when they are authentically copied from the composer's manuscript. A diminuendo sign is often printed to begin on the very note that ought to be the local climax.

An eighteenth-century trill begins on the upper of two notes: a nineteenth-century one begins on the lower. The most learned editors give the most diverse instructions on the playing of ornaments.

All this is bad enough. But how loud is *forte*? Is there any sense in asking a flute to play fortissimo or a trombone pianissimo?

How much does good tone depend on the pianist, how much on the piano? Are we justified in playing notes that were designed for natural horn on a valve horn, for a sackbut on a trombone, for a serpent on a tuba? May we play harpsichord music on a piano?

When an eighteenth-century composer asks for an improvised cadenza in a concerto what shall we do? Compose some fake Mozart or some genuine twentieth-

century music? Or shall we make some perfunctory flourish and skip the problem?

There are no easy answers. In some ways the easiest music to deal with is the music of linear design. That is why Bach's music survives not only the years but the changes in instruments and the attempts to transcribe and arrange him. Find a convincing tempo, and adjust the tone in good proportion between one line and another, and something good will emerge, even if you play on instruments and under conditions that Bach could never have foreseen.

Much harder in many ways is the problem of Mozart. The notes are so few and often so easy that a pianist is tempted to try to inflate them into something big or exciting; or perhaps he attempts a childlike simplicity and is merely dull in a way that a genuine musical child would never be. These same simple notes are often extraordinarily difficult for singers. Whether you are a pianist or a singer, you may be sure that any blemishes in technique will show up cruelly. You cannot storm your way through this music. To the puzzled student who has the frustrating feeling that he is being asked to play kid's stuff I say, "Imagine that you are listening to *Figaro*. Play the melody the way one of the characters would sing it—say Donna Anna. Or play this other melody in a *galant* way as though you were Don Giovanni singing 'Give Me Your Hand Fair Lady'."

With singers, on the other hand, I sometimes have to say that the singing is too fierce, and then I have to ask them to sing with the precision and elegance that would go into a Mozart piano concerto.

The romantic composers are easier for the student. Though no sort of music is easy at the highest levels of

interpretation, it is possible to reach a reasonably good level by playing with a sort of general imaginativeness. This is something less than great interpretation, less than finding the true style of each composer, but it is more than obediently "putting in the expression." The trouble with this is that students who have learned a charming and graceful way of playing are apt to apply one kind of charm to everything. Orchestral players fall into the same trap at times. The wind-player who suddenly has a little solo is apt to hold back the drive of a movement just because he is determined to play a series of beautifully produced warblings.

Perhaps the worst sinners in this respect are the singers. A great part of a singer's training goes—and must go—into voice production. And indeed I am the first to demand that before a singer sings any songs he must be able to sing a beautiful sound at any pitch within his range. I want an intonation that is not only on the bull's-eye, but also in the middle of it. I want the higher notes and the lower ones to belong to one another without any ugly break in register. (Far too many singers have two voices—one kind up to a certain note and another kind beyond it.) I want the kind of pulsation in the voice that is like the best kind of violin vibrato—not a heavy wobble that makes us wonder what note we are listening to, and not a straight-line sound like a factory hooter.

Yet, though I want all these qualities, I do not want a song to consist of just one beautifully-produced sound after another. This is as irritating as the sort of speech one sometimes hears from young actresses who have just emerged from elocution-school—the sort of speech that makes "parlous" and "powerless" indistinguishable. This is not beauty, it is mere prettiness. We go



to a concert or an opera not to listen to mere notes, however beautiful : we want the song, the aria, the story, and the character.

We must, of course, respect natural limitations. The lyric voice must not be asked to undertake heavy dramatic parts. The voice that plays tyrants and villains and stern fathers will not skip lightly through some delicate piece of pattering nonsense. Though some Wagnerian singers have given beautiful *lieder* recitals, we must not insist that they should.

Another problem is that of national styles. Some players and singers have a gift of mimicry and identification that enables them to be Hungarian gypsies at one moment, *grand seigneurs* at another. The Caucasian chief, the Negro slave, the Caliph of Baghdad, and the British Grenadier spring into immediate life from the style of the playing and the accent of the singing.

This kind of temperament is unteachable. The lack of it shows up more cruelly in singers than in players, for singers must be actors and impersonators in a more obvious way than pianists and violinists. But pianists and violinists had better have temperament too. Skill, intelligence, and culture should be added to temperament : they are not a substitute for it. I hold the view that there is an element of acting even in the most undemonstrative piano-playing and that there is an element of mime in keyboard technique.

There remains the personality of the performer. Like the actor who is to some degree himself whether he plays Richard III or Wilde's Ernest, the singer, the player, or the conductor must find Beethoven's emotions in himself and impart them to you in his own way. If he has a gift for this, if he can sway an audience he is under constant

temptation to put himself before the composer. No doubt we ought to applaud the composer more than the performer, but have you not noticed how you feel about a living composer who steps out on to the platform to take a bow after a first performance? Maybe you like the work: maybe you give him an ovation; but you have the odd feeling that he is an interloper and has no right to be there. When the programme proceeds to the well-known symphony you give your unrestrained applause to the conductor at the end and are satisfied not to see Tchaikovsky.

Critics fume and composers fret, but this is the way of the musical world, and I see no likelihood of a change. Do not begrudge the performer his applause. He has his brief hour, but his memoirs soon grow dusty on the shelf. The composer sees him out as he sees so many "great men" make their exits. Beethoven lived to see the decline and fall of Napoleon. There is a story that he said, "I wrote that man's funeral march long ago." The march lasts long after the funeral is forgotten.

## CHAPTER XV

### MODERN MUSIC

THE old music has been sifted out for us by Father Time. It is only the scholar who now tries to find out why the forgotten Piccini was once regarded as a rival to Gluck, why Bononcini was matched against Handel, why Meyerbeer was more successful in Paris than Wagner.

Father Time has not had time in which to decide whether Walton will outlive Britten, or Britten Walton, or whether the souls of both will go marching on. You must decide that for yourself. Going to concerts of contemporary music you must listen to the good and the bad. *You* must say whether specimen-A is worth remembering despite its faults, while specimen-B is worth forgetting despite its virtues.

Where shall we begin the story of modern music? There is a tendency to think that "modern music" is a phrase that may be applied only to difficult music. You may apply it to Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, but not to his *Clair de Lune*, and you must on no account apply it to the music of Debussy's contemporary, Puccini, because Puccini wrote the sort of music that bequeathed three-quarters of a million pounds to his heirs. This may seem illogical, but there is some sense in it. Puccini was a composer of genius, but it is precisely his best qualities that so much contemporary music seems determined to avoid—qualities of easy intelligibility, flowing sentiment, and singability.

In no period has music been so hard on the voice as

today's. The results are serious, since we can best remember the music we can sing. I have a friend, a non-playing "gramophile," who swears he can whistle, sing, and hum whole symphonies. Let them be as elaborate as possible, with all sorts of chromatic harmony and involved counterpoint—he finds a line to follow with his voice and, by the aid of that line, remembers the totality. He cannot do this with modern music. It defeats him.

Partly this is because the melodies proceed through intervals that bother the normal ear. At one time I thought that familiarity would make them easy. Now I am no longer convinced. You have only to try to get singing students to sing "ordinary" songs in tune; you have only to give lenient ear-tests to examination candidates, to realize that the plain man's ear is in no condition to cope with the modern composer's melodic procedure. Nor is this all.

Until modern times, harmony, rhythm, and form went hand in hand. When a melody reached its final cadence, our sense of finality came from the progress of the tune towards a homing-note, from a rhythmic feeling that now was the moment, and from the resolution of discord into concord. It was easy to know where you had got to. (Or perhaps I ought to say it was easy once the music had become familiar. On first hearing, a long work might include some bewildering moments.) We must remember that music proceeds at a given tempo. We cannot, as with a new book, read it slowly—not unless we are performers practising. We have to hear a quick movement presto. If we miss some particular point, we must await another performance and hear it all through again.

Some modern music, like the older music, does

become more understandable on repetition. I well recall how incomprehensible Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* seemed when I heard it first, not long after the First World War, how much easier it seemed on a second hearing, and how familiar it was in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*. Because of this, some people are quick to argue that it is all a matter of patience. They remind you that some of the old masterpieces were laughed at when they were first played. For my part, I am not altogether satisfied that this is true.

Though all the great masters met some opposition here and there, they most of them enjoyed admiration in their own lifetimes. Handel made several fortunes, Haydn grew prosperous, Beethoven was able to describe himself as the most celebrated composer in Europe, Wagner's festival theatre was paid for in part by admirers from all over the world, and many of the operatic composers lived like lords. Even Mozart, who was buried in a pauper's grave, was at any rate famous.

Which modern composers have captured and captivated a large public? Debussy, yes. Ravel, yes. Their music soon eluded the embrace of the arbiters of elegance. At first the general public was suspicious. The general public shies away from anything highbrow, little realizing that the highbrows are the huntsmen, explorers, and mountaineers who are constantly opening up new territory. We may not always accept what they bring back for inspection: the stay-at-home public may resent the snobbery of the globe-trotter; but we should be poor without them.

At the very moment when the public decides that it will take a new specimen into the home, the man-in-the-street says, "I don't call *that* highbrow," and the critic



says, "Well, of course, it is fine enough in its way, but terribly hackneyed, don't you think?"

Debussy and Ravel seemed very modern in their day, and some of the works still seem a little exotic in a Prom programme, but their impressionism now seems to belong to the late romantic era. The little tricks of their trade are now exploited by commercial orchestrators. (The musicianship in commercial music always has been thirty years behind the times.)

More truly of our world are Bartók and Schönberg. Bartók, who was a profound student of folk-music in many countries, seems in some ways a primitive figure, but technically he often used the highly modern device called polytonality. In a rough-and-ready way one could say that this consists of playing in one key in the treble and in another in the bass. I can think of one of his pieces that could be said to be in A-minor and F-sharp-minor both at once. I must not give the impression, however, that this is a mere trick or that it goes on all the time. Bartók wrote music of remarkable strength, depth, and variety.

He lived to a good age: he knew his music was performed in all the great centres; but I would find it difficult to describe him as a composer who has been taken to the heart of the larger musical public.

With Schönberg, the failure to "connect" is much more marked. He is an old man. His music remains as controversial as though he were some perky youngster. I have myself tried practising some of his smaller piano pieces in the hope that my fingers would instruct my ears—as a pianist's fingers often do. At the risk of being derided—at the risk of having to deride myself later on—I go on record as being baffled. I have read the theoretical explanations of "atonality," I can see in cold print



how the music is constructed, but I am still at a loss. One sign is that I can only obey the many marks of expression in a mechanical way, going soft and loud where I am told to, and distinguishing between legato and staccato. But, so far, I do not feel this expression. I could not divine the expression if it were not there, and this is something I can do with assurance in many other kinds of music.

Modern music is nearly all difficult to perform. Chopin once blamed himself because he had failed to write easy *études* for the humbler kind of pianist. But at any rate Chopin wrote a great many waltzes and mazurkas that are easy enough. Some of the preludes are only of medium difficulty: the nocturnes too. Nearly all the older masters are accessible in this way. The two-part inventions are available to those who fear the forty-eight. The *Moonlight* beckons to those who dare not attempt the *Hammerklavier*. The amateur who fails with a Transcendental Study may find consolation in a *Consolation*.

The moderns are less accommodating. Bartók, realising this, wrote the graded small pieces of his *Mikrokosmos*. Hindemith's *Ludus Tonalis* provides some pages that might be attempted by the non-professional—not many.

When I ask teaching-diploma candidates, "What modern music would you give to your pupils?", they usually say, "John Ireland for English music, and Poulenc for French," and there they stick.

In our own country, Vaughan Williams has most closely followed the great-master pattern, becoming ever more widely acceptable, his music more and more familiar and loved. Even those who are not admirers feel that he seems to be settling into place as one of the great im-


movables. His "exportability" may be in ~~his~~ <sup>its</sup> doubt, but I would dare to prophesy that he will remain with his fellow-countrymen for a long time.

Prophecy, always dangerous, is now reckless. Europe has more than once trembled for her future, seeing the shadow of Tartar or Turk growing nearer, or lying half smothered beneath a Napoleon or a Hitler. Now we are like people who, having survived earthquake, fire, and flood, break their necks through fiddling about with some machine that is not properly under control. We are like the child who recovers from pneumonia only to blow himself up on Guy Fawkes Day.

It may be that the composers, like the seers of old, have foreseen this tragedy and have composed the tense, unrelaxed music of modern times accordingly.

In ancient times people believed that the gods, however powerful, could be influenced by sympathetic magic. Offer them burnt sacrifices, dance your way into the rhythms of the heavenly bodies, conjure the sun and mime the rain, and live in hope of a good harvest. We cannot now persuade ourselves that our music is likely to influence the Harmony of the Spheres—or their disharmony. Can we influence the demons that dwell in ourselves? There is little enough evidence to shew that music soothes the savage breast.

Nevertheless it would be pleasant to have another Schubert. I do not mean an imitation Schubert. I mean another one.



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